ALL STORIES NEW . . . NO REPRINTS

# RANCH ROMANCES

25c

SECOND DECEMBER NUMBER
A THRILLING PUBLICATION

FEATURING
**TREACHERY TRAIL**
By Teddy Keller

Beginning
**STRANGE RIDER**
By Joseph Wayne

Reducing Specialist Says:

# LOSE WEIGHT Where It Shows Most REDUCE MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

# ELECTRIC Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing Penetrating Massage

FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use spot REDUCER with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

Spot Reducer

UNDERWRITERS LABORATORY APPROVED

Take pounds off — keep slim and trim with Spot Reducer! Remarkable new invention which uses one of the most effective reducing methods employed by masseurs and turkish baths—MASSAGE!

## TAKE OFF EXCESS WEIGHT!

### Don't Stay FAT—You Can LOSE POUNDS and INCHES SAFELY Without Risking HEALTH

LIKE magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body, where it is loose and flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful, slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercises or strict diets. No steambaths drugs or laxatives.

With the SPOT REDUCER you can now enjoy the benefits of RELAXING, SOOTHING massage in the privacy of your own home. Simple to use—just plug in, grasp handle and apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, neck, thighs, arms, buttocks, etc. The relaxing, soothing massage breaks down FATTY TISSUES, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat—helps you regain and keep a firmer and more GRACEFUL FIGURE!

### YOUR OWN PRIVATE MASSEUR AT HOME

When you use the Spot Reducer, it's almost like having your own private masseur at home. It's fun reducing this way! It not only helps you reduce and keep slim—but also aids in the relief of those types of aches and pains—and tired nerves that can be helped by massage! The Spot Reducer is handsomely made of light weight aluminum and rubber and truly a beautiful invention you will be thankful you own. AC 110 volts. Underwriters Laboratory approved.

MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

## TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval! Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it or ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

### ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

**CAN'T SLEEP:**

Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

**MUSCULAR ACHES:**

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

### USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

**ORDER IT TODAY!**

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

BODY MASSAGER CO., Dept. B-463
318 Market St., Newark, N. J.

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose $1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only $8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of full purchase price.

☐ I enclose $12.98. Send DeLuxe Model.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE—check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

**EXTRA! EXTRA!**
If you mail coupon at once — we'll send you exciting new "PUZZLE FUN" free of charge.
MAIL COUPON BELOW

# BOYS! GIRLS! LADIES! MEN!
# GIVEN! GIVEN!
## YES WE GIVE YOU PREMIUMS or CASH

## THIS IS AN AMAZING OFFER
## NOTHING TO BUY—ALL GIVEN
## MAIL COUPON BELOW . . .

Candid Cameras with Carrying Case, Telescopes, Watches (sent ppd.) SIMPLY GIVE pictures with White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE easily sold to friends, neighbors, relatives at 35¢ a box (with picture). Alarm Clocks, Aluminum Ware, Billfolds, Record Players, Dresser Sets, etc. **GET BIG FREE CATALOG**

### EXTRA FREE GIFT FOR MAILING COUPON NOW

You'll receive "PUZZLE FUN" — a thrilling collection of 15 puzzles—18 riddles. All real stumpers but easy when you know how — and we give you all the answers. Work 'em on your friends — they'll think you're a real smarty! Great fun for everybody! MAIL COUPON!

### MAIL COUPON

("Puzzle Fun" will be sent to you absolutely FREE)

**Wilson Chemical Co., Dept. TC-3I, Tyrone, Pa. Date.....**

Gentlemen:- Please send me on trial 14 colorful art pictures with 14 boxes of White CLOVERINE Brand SALVE to sell at 35c a box (with picture). I will remit amount asked within 30 days, select a Premium or keep Cash Commission as explained under Premium wanted in catalog sent with order, postage paid to start. Be sure to send my FREE "PUZZLE FUN".

NAME ..... AGE .....

ST. ..... R. D. ..... BOX .....

TOWN ..... ZONE NO. ..... STATE .....

PRINT LAST NAME HERE

Paste coupon on postal card or mail in envelope today

**WILSON CHEMICAL COMPANY**
**Dept. TC-3I, Tyrone, Pa.**

32nd Year
OF PUBLICATION

SECOND
DECEMBER NUMBER

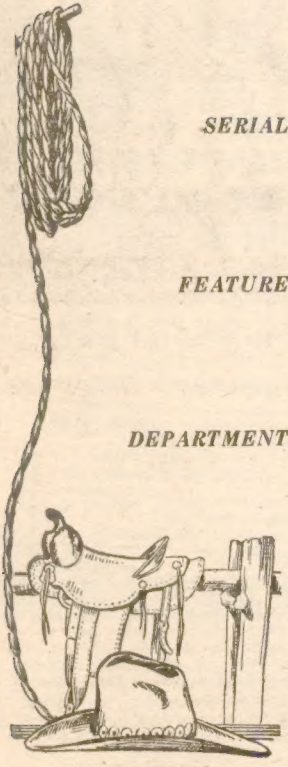
December 14, 1956
Volume 202, No. 1

# RANCH ROMANCES

## CONTENTS

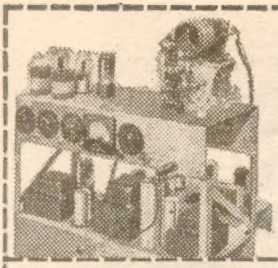
ON SALE EVERY OTHER FRIDAY


| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *NOVEL* | TREACHERY TRAIL | Teddy Keller | 14 |
| *SHORT STORIES* | DAY OF RECKONING | M. E. Bradshaw | 44 |
| | HEART OF A LAWMAN | Art Kercheval | 76 |
| | PREACHER'S WIFE | William Heuman | 92 |
| *SERIALS* | STRANGE RIDER, Part One | Joseph Wayne | 54 |
| | THE MAN FROM YESTERDAY, Conclusion | Wayne D. Overholser | 101 |
| *FEATURES* | THE HORNED TOAD, Verse | S. Omar Barker | 81 |
| | HALLOWE'EN ALL WINTER, a True Story | T. J. Kerttula and D. L. McDonald | 87 |
| *DEPARTMENTS* | OUR AIR MAIL | Our Readers | 6 |
| | TRAIL DUST | | 9 |
| | RANCH FLICKER TALK<br>Run for the Sun<br>Ben Cooper | Bob Cummings | 10<br>12 |
| | KNOW YOUR WEST, a quiz | Rattlesnake Robert | 90 |
| | OUT OF THE CHUTES | The Editors | 91 |
| | WHOM SHALL I MARRY? | Professor Marcus Mari | 100 |
| | CROSSWORD PUZZLE | | 114 |

HELEN TONO
*Editor*

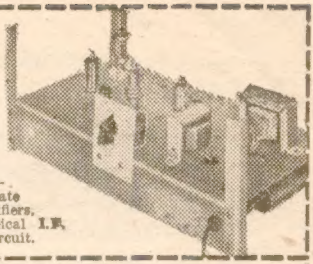
RANCH ROMANCES issued bi-weekly by Literary Enterprises, Inc., 1125 E. Vaile Ave., Kokomo, Ind. N. L. Pines, President. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office at Kokomo, Ind., under Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25c; Yearly subscription, $5.00; add 80c for Canadian, $1.50 for foreign and Pan-American subscriptions. Editorial and Executive Offices, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Title registered as Trade Mark in U. S. Patent Office. Copyright 1956 by Literary Enterprises, Inc. Printed in the U.S.A. The names of all persons in fiction stories in this magazine have no reference to any person living or dead. Ranch Romances does not assume responsibility for safe return of unsolicited manuscripts.



## YOU BUILD Broadcasting Transmitter

As part of N.R.I. Communications Course you build this low power Transmitter; use it to learn methods required of commercial broadcasting operators, train for FCC license.

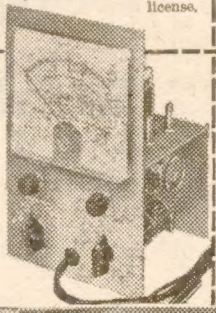
## YOU BUILD Signal Generator



N.R.I. sends kits of parts to build this Signal Generator. You get practical experience, conduct tests to compensate Radio frequency amplifiers, practice aligning a typical I.F. video amplifier in TV circuit.

## YOU BUILD Vacuum Tube Voltmeter

Use it to get practical experience, earn extra cash fixing neighbors' sets in spare time. With N.R.I. training you work on circuits common to both Radio and TV. Equipment you build "brings to life" things you learn in N.R.I.'s easy-to-understand lessons. 64 page Catalog FREE, shows all equipment you get.



## YOU BUILD AC-DC Superhet Receiver

N.R.I. servicing training supplies all the parts, everything is yours to keep. Nothing takes the place of practical experience. You get actual servicing experience by practicing with this modern receiver; you learn by doing.

# Learn RADIO TELEVISION

## by Practicing at Home

## WHAT GRADUATES DO AND SAY

"I am Chief Engineer of Station KGCU in Mandan, N. D. I also have my own spare time business servicing high frequency two-way communications systems."
P. BARRETT, Bismark, N. D.

"I am doing very well in spare time TV and Radio. Sometimes have three TV jobs waiting and also fix car Radios for garages. I paid for instruments out of earnings."
G. F. SEAMAN, New York, N. Y.

"We have an appliance store with our Radio and TV servicing, and get TV repairs. During my Army service, NRI training helped get me a top rated job."
W. M. WEIDNER, Fairfax, S. D.

## NEED FOR TECHNICIANS INCREASING

### *Fast Growing Field Offers Good Pay, Bright Future*

Today's OPPORTUNITY field is Radio-Television. Over 125 million home Radios plus 30 million sets in cars and 40,000,000 Television sets means big money for trained Radio-TV Technicians. More than 4,000 Radio and TV Broadcasting stations offer interesting and important positions for technicians, operators, Color television, portable TV sets, Hi-Fi, other developments assure future growth.

It's the trained man who gets ahead. The fellow who uses his spare time to develop knowledge and skill gets the better job, drives a better car, lives in a better home, is respected for what he knows and can do. So plan now to get into Radio-TV.

Keep your job while training with N.R.I. you learn at home in your spare time. N.R.I. is oldest and largest home study Radio-TV School. Our methods have proved successful for more than 40 years.

Soon after enrolling, many N.R.I. students start to earn $10, $15 a week extra in spare time fixing sets. Many open their own full time Radio-TV shops after getting N.R.I. Diploma. Find out more. Mail coupon. Cost is low, terms easy; includes all equipment. Address: National Radio Institute, Dept. 7 AQ., Washington 9, D.C.

**Send for LESSON and CATALOG FREE**

**VETERANS** Available under G.I. Bills

## MAIL COUPON NOW

**NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE**
**Dept. 7AQ, Washington 9, D. C.**

Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-Page Catalog, FREE. (No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name_____ Age____

Address_____

City_____ Zone____ State_____

APPROVED MEMBER, NATIONAL HOME STUDY COUNCIL

### Hospital Case

Dear Editor:

I am 25 years old, 5'11" tall, weigh 165 lbs., and have brown hair and eyes. At present, I am at a hospital and expect to be here at least a year or so. I get very few letters and therefore would like to receive mail from both men and women between the ages of 19 and 30 years old. My likes run to baseball, dancing, T.V., good movies and a few sports.

JAMES GIROUARD

c/o Hospital N. Wing
Greenbell Spring, Louisiana

### Western Cowboy

Dear Editor:

I wonder if a Montana cowboy could get into "Our Air Mail?" I'm 34 years old, 5'7½" tall and weigh 150 lbs. and feel that I'm a good natured person. I have lived on a ranch all my life and it gets mighty lonesome at times. Would especially like to hear from girls my own age or younger.

CHARLES REICHER

Fromberg, Montana

### Likes Western Folks

Dear Editor:

Being an Eastener, I have always been very interested in the West, its people and their way of life. I'm a single young miss of 30. I especially like popular music and animals and would like to hear from girls between 20 and 40 years old and boys between 28 and 38 years old. All letters will be welcome though.

ENID F. SMITH

453 East Arch Street
Pottsville, Pennsylvania

### Another Country

Dear Editor:

I hope that I may be fortunate enough to have my name in RANCH ROMANCES. I'm 20 years old, 5'5" tall, weigh 138 lbs., and have dark brown hair and eyes. My hobbies are dancing, boxing, swimming, playing cricket and tennis and going to the movies. I work as an assistant chemist. Would like to write to all different kinds of boys and girls all over the world.

KELVIN JOSEPH

Fyzakad,
Trinidad,
B.W.I.

### Vivacious Young Miss

Dear Editor:

Hi! May I come in and join your column? I'm a young lady, 26 years old, 5'7" tall, with dark brown hair and blue eyes, who likes jazz and popular music and has a large record collection. I work for a magazine, and also like to write articles and letters in my spare time. I have my own car and like to take trips around the countryside on weekends. Would especially like to hear from men between the ages of 26 and 30.

DOLORES McMULLEN

20 Irving Place
Staten Island, New York

**EDITOR'S NOTE: For 31 years Our Air Mail has been linking the readers of Ranch Romances. You may write directly to anyone whose letter is published, if you uphold the wholesome spirit of Ranch Romances.**

**Our Air Mail is intended for those who really want correspondents. Be sure to sign your own name. Address letters for publication to Our Air Mail, Ranch Romances, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.**

### Two Young Misses

Dear Editor:

We are two girls who would like very much to correspond with servicemen between the ages of 18 and 25. Ginger is 18 years old, 5'7" tall, and has brown hair and blue eyes. Janet is 17 years old, 5'4" tall, and has dark brown hair and brown eyes. We'll be keeping a watch on our mailboxes to see if we receive any replies.

GINGER HOLLOPETER
P. O. Box 13
Clipper Mills, California

JANET NELSON
2058 Wilcox Avenue
Oroville, California

### Long-Time Reader

Dear Editor:

I have been a RANCH ROMANCES reader for about ten years and enjoy the magazine very much. I am 35 years old, weigh 144 lbs., and have brown hair and hazel eyes. Would appreciate hearing from men and women around my own age, and will answer all letters I receive.

LENARD W. COCKRALL

Antonio Sanatarium
c/o General Hospital
Santa Barbara, California

### The Younger Set

Dear Editor:

I would like to become a member of "Our Air Mail." I am 10 years old. My hobbies are collecting view cards, match book covers, cactus, and Indian pennies. Would enjoy hearing from a lot of boys and girls.

CHARLIE H. KLASSEN

Box 231
Merkel, Texas

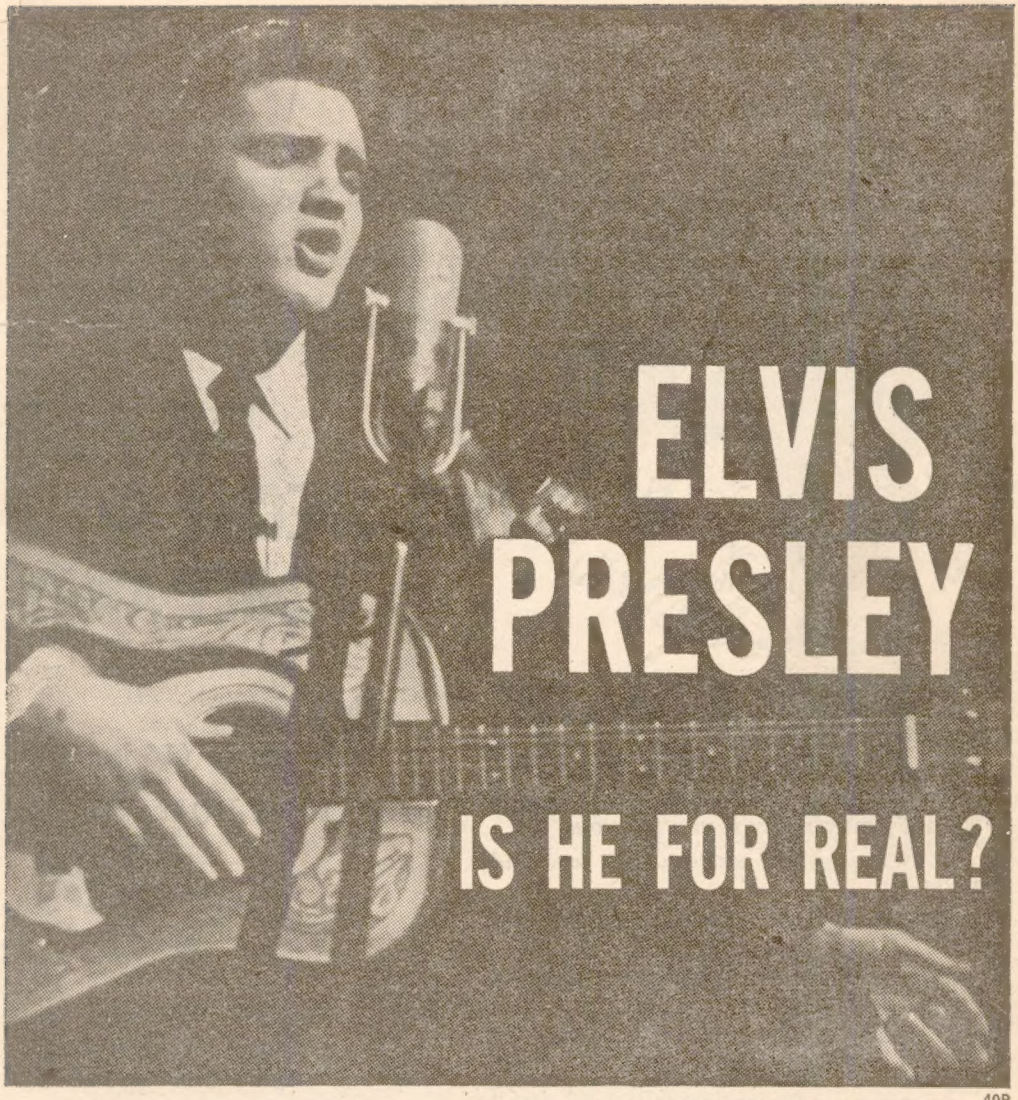
### Cattle Ranch Dweller

Dear Editor:

I'm 16 years old, 5'2" tall, weigh 120 lbs., and have reddish brown hair and hazel eyes. I live on a cattle ranch. My hobbies are horseback riding and listening to and singing Western music. Come on, all you guys and gals, fill my mailbox to the top. Would also like to trade snapshots.

GERRY SCOTT

Tonasket, Washington




40P

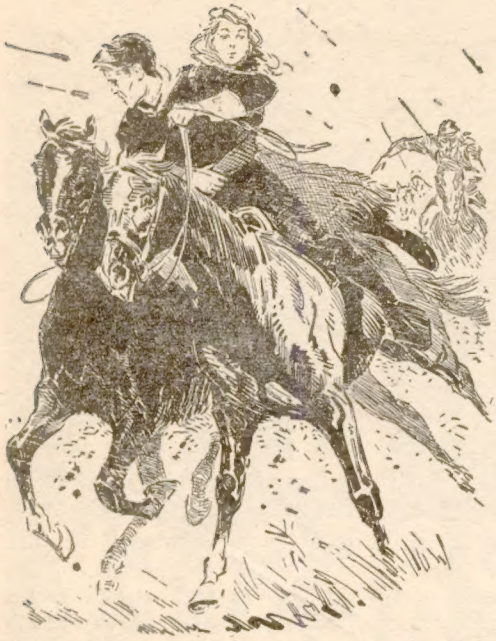
*You've heard the rumors and arguments—now read the amazing, intimate story of the controversial boy wonder of Rock 'n' Roll, in the current issue of*

**Silver Screen**

**Buy it at your newsstand today!**

Silver Screen
Why Liz and Mike had to call it quits!
ELVIS PRESLEY Is he for real?
Sheilah Graham's Intimate Gossip!
How John Derek fights loneliness
The complete Marilyn Monroe story

**EXTRA BONUS: The Complete Story of Marilyn Monroe! 10 full pages!**



# DON'T LET THIS SPECIAL OFFER GET AWAY!

By accepting this special introductory deal, you save a big $1.01 on single-copy costs – assure uninterrupted delivery of RANCH ROMANCES right to your home!

Here's what you get for little more than a penny a day if you act *now:*

- *over 1700 pages of western-style love and action*
- *more than 100 new novels, novelettes and short stories*
- *almost 25 stranger-than-fiction true tales of the Old West*
- *plus a regular Western movie feature by Robert Cummings . . . personal correspondence column . . . advice on love and marriage . . . cartoons . . . Western crosswords . . . and much, much more.*

**32** weeks (16 issues) of RANCH ROMANCES only **$2.99**

Use this handy order form today to take advantage of the *greatest reading bargain in America!*

**RANCH ROMANCES** 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. RR 12-1

Yes, enter my RANCH ROMANCES subscription for the next 32 weeks (16 issues) at only $2.99 . . . a money-saving rate that brings me the equivalent of 4 issues as a gift. My $2.99 is enclosed.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

*(Add 50¢ for Canadian postage; $1.00 for foreign)*

# TRAIL DUST

**PARDNERS! Here's an open invitation to you to cut sign on colorful happenings of today's West. Send clippings to us, and include the name and date of the paper where you found it. We'll send you one dollar per usable item; in case of duplicates, first come, first served!**

DEER at Glacier National Park, Mont., are giving park personnel quite a problem. They would rather nibble Christmas trees and wreaths than natural foliage, so park people have to guard their seasonal decorations carefully. A chemical whose odor scares deer away has been tried on the trees, but the trouble is that people can't stand it either.

EARLY morning motorists were startled to discover a very dead rooster lying in the middle of a busy Bryan, Tex., street, with a live hen sitting beside him. The hen eventually went away, leaving behind a final tribute to the dear departed—a newly-laid egg.

POSTMEN in Sacramento, Calif., have discovered how to keep unfriendly dogs under control. The mail carriers make friends with the biggest dog in the neighborhood and get it to tag along on their route. Smaller dogs are scared off and don't get close enough to bite.

ADMITTING he stole a car for use in a gas station holdup, a Detroit, Mich., thief assured police he let a companion drive the car—because he didn't want his driver's license to be revoked.

YOUTHFUL Christmas carolers gathered around the gayly-decorated tree in front of a Tucson, Ariz., home. They sang sweetly and, even when they were gone, the memory of them lingered on—because they had deftly stripped the tree of its thirty-seven blue lights.

LEARNING that his family was moving to Chicago because his father's firm was transferring him there, a six-year-old Milwaukee, Wisc., boy burst into tears. His problem: he felt he was "too old to make new friends."

ON A reservation in Caughnawaga, Quebec, an Indian who has sold curios to tourists for years has prospered so well he now has a television set in his tepee.

RESPONDING to a frantic call, a doctor came hurrying to the scene when two cars collided and crashed into a tree in Oklahoma City, Okla. After a thorough examination, the doctor—a tree surgeon—said the tree would survive.

IT'S A very small world, according to a county agent who lives on Washington Street in Greenville, Miss. He's been transferred to Liberia as an agricultural advisor, and his new headquarters will be on Washington Street in Greenville, Liberia.

LISTING debts of $5,725 and assets of $1,550, an Albuquerque, N. M., man asked the court to declare him bankrupt. He said he was employed as a financial consultant.

# RANCH
## FLICKER TALK

by movie editor BOB CUMMINGS

*This famous top-hand of stage, screen and TV corrals the best of the Westerns*

# Run For The Sun

***The hunting is good in United Artists' new action movie . . . and the quarry is that most dangerous of all living creatures—man!***

AN AUTHOR once wrote a short story called *The Most Dangerous Game,* which turned out to be one of the most durable and profitable pieces of fiction ever published. It has been reprinted again and again; it has been used on the stage; in the movies it has provided a thrilling plot, disguised with new characters and different settings, for many an action picture.

Its basic idea is that the most dangerous game for a hunter to track is a man. A man is not as swift as a deer, as vicious as a tiger, nor as strong as an elephant, but he is more intelligent than any animal, and therefore harder to bring to bay.

The most recent version of this idea is *Run for the Sun,* starring Richard Widmark, Jane Greer and Trevor Howard, released by United Artists. The grueling manhunt is the climax of the picture, but a modern story has been added, complete with romance, to bring a tried-and-true situation up to date.

When you see the movie, I think you'll agree that it doesn't take a brand-new idea to make an exciting story of today.

*Run for the Sun* opens in Mexico with Jane Greer, who plays a magazine reporter, looking for a missing American writer, Richard Widmark. She finds him easily enough, but she cannot bear to send the story back, the story of a man who has lost everything he valued in life—first his wife, then his ability to write. She decides to go home and let Richard keep his secret.

In gratitude he offers to fly her to Mexico City, but the plane goes off its course and they crash-land in the jungle.

In this remote wilderness they meet two men, living in a hacienda, who pretend to be archeologists looking for remains of a lost civilization. But Richard, hearing the clipped, familiar British accent of one of the men (Trevor Howard) recognizes him as the infamous "Lord Haw-Haw" who broadcast for the Nazis during the war.

Howard admits his identity, but offers Jane

and Richard what he calls a sporting chance to get away. He will let them leave the hacienda, he says, but then he and his friend, heavily armed and with a pack of dogs, will track them down in the jungle.

Then the manhunt begins. Jane and Richard have no weapons, except a machete and one souvenir bullet Richard saved from the war. They evade the trap Howard has set for them, maintaining a hair's breadth lead over the dogs by plunging into jungle rivers and penetrating deeper into the swamps.

This grim life-and-death chase takes thirty-five minutes on the screen, but it took thirty-five days to get it on film. There was no faking of the ordeals that Jane and Dick went through.

"It wouldn't have been much tougher," said Jane, "if we'd really been running for our lives—except of course we knew nobody was actually going to shoot us. But I didn't feel the least bit safe from drowning, heat prostration or snakebite."

Jane lost eight pounds during this arduous location filming, and Dick lost thirteen.

"It's a lot more trouble than going on a diet," said Dick, "but six weeks in a Mexican jungle is positively guaranteed to trim down your waistline."

That setting for the picture was chosen because world travelers have rated it the most impenetrably wild country in the world.

"We wanted to make *Run for the Sun* as realistic as possible," said Dick. "That's why we chose the toughest location we could, and that's also why the director made Jane and me actually fight our way through the jungle with as little help from the crew as possible."

"There wasn't much they could do to help us," Jane added. "They could hardly go around fanning us against the sweltering heat, or slapping at those millions of insects for us. However, it was nice to know there were some other people around when we unexpectedly met up with jungle wild life, like a puma, an ocelot and—" she shuddered—"that twenty-five-foot boa constrictor."

Dick told me that the director, Ray Boulting, is a stickler for realism, and his slogan is "You can't deceive the camera."

"And believe me," said Dick, "he didn't even try."

*Jane Greer and Richard Widmark find an interesting clue in a book*

# BEN COOPER
## Early Starter

RANCH FLICKER TALK

NEIGHBORS of the Coopers on Long Island used to say that young Ben Cooper was all boy—in fact, he was too much boy.

He could swim like a fish—well enough to save another youngster's life when Ben was only six. He was a local baseball star, and set an all-time record for broken windows in those parts. With his sister, Bunny, he put on shows in the garage, and he had special costumes for other activities during the day. He was Dizzy Dean in his baseball suit, and Captain Kidd in his sailing outfit. He had a soldier uniform for when he played war games or dug trenches in his mother's garden.

He kept as pets one dog, nine cats, a deodorized skunk named Fifinella and a pony named Gypsy. He had a cowboy outfit for riding Gypsy, of course, and he carried a toy sixgun. "I must ride well and shoot straight," he informed his parents, "if I'm going to be a big Western star."

All this happened before Ben was eight. That year was the beginning of his professional theatrical career. A friend of the family suggested that he try out for a part as one of the sons in Life With Father. Ben said he wanted to do it—just to see what it's like backstage." But he memorized the entire play before he went to the try-out.

He got the part and played it until he grew out of it, but by that time he was well-established in radio.

For twelve years Ben played in soap operas. He did over 3,000 shows and he had thirty-three different fathers. But in spite of his career, he never neglected his studies.

His New York career led naturally to Hollywood, where he attracted raves for his performance in *Rose Tattoo*. He hasn't forgotten his early ambition to be a Western star, however, and recently appeared in United Artists' *Rebel in Town*.

In the meantime, he's having a lot of fun. Until a short time ago the gossip columnists considered him one of Hollywood's most eligible bachelors. Now that he's become the husband of beautiful Venetia Stevenson, he's the happiest young married man in town.

While still enjoying his bachelor status, he appeared at the *Rose Tattoo* premiere with a dark beauty on his arm. Eyebrows were raised, and people asked each other, "Who's she?"

Ben was happy to explain, "It's my sister, Bunny," but it took quite a while for the gossips to believe him.

Bunny and Ben are still the devoted pals they used to be when they were putting on amateur theatricals in the garage. The only time Bunny was seen in anything but a laughing mood with her kid brother was when she heard the applause for him in *Rose Tattoo*. Then she had tears in her eyes and was "so proud I thought I'd bust."

Bunny moved into Ben's bachelor apartment while she was in Hollywood. She got him up in the morning, cooked for him, and washed his dishes.

"All that was fine," says Ben, "but the trouble was she also answered the phone. If a girl called and heard that feminine, 'hello,' she'd hang up."

However, it didn't work out too badly, according to Ben, because if a boy called and heard that 'hello,' he'd invite her to a party, and Ben would go along as chaperone. So his social life was busier than ever while Bunny was in town.

All that is behind him now, of course. When Ben goes to parties these days, they're likely to be quiet gatherings with other young couples. And, at these affairs, Ben and his Venetia are always voted one of the most devoted pairs present.

*United Artists*

***As a youngster, Ben was "all boy"—and all set to become an actor***

# Treachery Trail

*There was only one way to clean up the town . . . Jeff set a fuse and let the gamblers and gunslingers blow themselves off the map*

JEFF MARTIN propped his pitch fork against the back door of the stable and mopped his dripping forehead. Every bone in his body ached with weariness. And every fibre of his soul cried out in rebellion. A lousy stable-swamper, that's all he was. Sure the sign over the door said, "Pawnee Livery Stable, Jeff Martin, Prop." A fancy title for being a lackey boy and a shoveler of manure.

Clamping his lips together, Jeff gripped the fork again. Suddenly, then, he flung it down. It wasn't fair. He was Jeff Martin. A year ago he'd had

by TEDDY KELLER

a promising ranch and some good stock. A year ago he'd had the world at his very feet. And a year ago he'd had the prettiest bride in the valley.

The thought sucked the breath from him for a moment, as a great sadness rolled over him. Then black fury filled him, and he sprang at the pitch fork, seized it and hurled it against the stable wall.

"Damn you, Sam Hollister!" he shouted. "Damn your filthy soul clean to hell and every manjack of your murdering crew with you."

Rage shook him and he plunged into an empty stall. Floundering like a drowning man, he found his jug beneath the straw. He ripped out the cork and put the jug to his lips.

"Jeff." The voice rang through the stable. "Jeff Martin. You in there?"

The shouted words pushed back the veil of rage, and sanity edged into Jeff's mind. Lowering the jug, he shook his head; blinked, took a deep breath.

"Jeff! Hey, where are you?"

Now Jeff recognized the voice, and he cursed himself that he hadn't started sooner on the cheap corn whiskey. Hugging the jug to him, he crawled deeper into the stall.

"Jeff, I know you're in there. Now you come on out. They're hollering for you over to the sheriff's."

"Then let 'em holler," Jeff shouted. He bit down hard on his tongue, but the words were out.

"I knew you were there all the time."

Jeff rammed the jug down into the straw. He yelled, "Clem Highsmith, you get the hell out of here."

"I ain't going to do no such thing," Clem said, his voice nearer now. "They told me to come and get you."

"Who told you?"

"Everybody. They're all over to the sheriff's. Manders and the preacher and Thomason and Huston and everybody."

"What do they want?"

"There's big trouble. You come on now and they can tell you."

Jeff was staring at the scuffed and battered size 14 boots. He gazed up past the faded pants and gingham shirt to the weathered, rugged face. There was bull power still in the old rancher's frame. Jeff knew that if Clem took a notion he could toss Jeff over his shoulder and carry him to the sheriff's as easy as not. But a soft light glowed in the misty blue eyes.

"I knew a gent who lost a leg once," Clem said. "It took him about a month to get tired of feeling sorry for himself. Then he rigged up a cork leg, and dang my hide if he couldn't fork a horse or dance a jig good as any man."

"All right," Jeff said, shoving to his feet. "They sent you to fetch, not to preach. Let's go."

Clem grinned, and Jeff shouldered past him into the street. The afternoon's heat shimmered between the double row of buildings, the high false fronts holding the heat like a bake-oven. Jeff hesitated momentarily. It hit him again as always, that feeling of being a prisoner, hemmed in by the tight little town, barred from the open range by the bitterest circumstances.

He glanced to Clem and turned up the street. Slowly he stepped up to the boardwalk and moved on past the stock pens, the feed store, the saddle and harness store, the vacant lot, the dusty cross street and finally came to the ugly stone court house. He heard the voices even before he turned into the sheriff's office. As he pushed through the screen door, the babble broke off.

Pausing, he let his eyes adjust from the glare of the street. Then he saw them, the ones Clem had mentioned and more. Bunched around the sheriff's desk, they began to move aside. The preacher, the ranchers, the storekeepers, the farmers. Then Banker Thomason faced Jeff from behind the desk.

"Clem," Thomason said, "you didn't find Sheriff Hoad?"

"Sure didn't," Clem said from behind Jeff.

"That old fool," somebody said.

"Gently," the parson said. "The Scriptures are explicit concerning the use of that word. Sheriff Hoad may be elderly, but he's nobody's fool."

"Then where in blazes is he?" another man asked.

The parson cleared his throat. "Probably about his county's business."

Jeff glanced at the parson, instinctively liking him, not knowing him. Of course Jeff didn't know the man. He hadn't been to church in a year—not since two days before Betty was killed.

THE thought of her was the broken dam that flooded his brain with memories both bitter and sweet. He let himself peer into the past, searching, hoping, trying to conjure up something to which he could cling. But the more desperately he reached back, the fainter the images became. He closed his eyes and tried again . . .

"Martin, I'm speaking to you."

He shook himself and glanced around, feeling the rush of color in his tanned, hollow face. "Sure, sure," he said quickly. "I'm listening. Go on."

A short, brisk little man, Thomason frowned at Jeff, then to the folks assembled in the small office. Adjusting pince-nez spectacles on a small nose, he said, "I was saying that where there's smoke, there's fire. We all saw the smoke a month ago when the talk began. Now we have the fire, and we want to know what you plan to do about it."

"Me?" Jeff said. "What fire?"

"Good heavens, man," Thomason said, "do you mean you haven't heard? Where do you keep yourself all day?"

"Heard what?" Jeff asked irritably. "What's all this hullabaloo about smoke and fire?"

"Don't you have ears?" Thomason asked impatiently. "The rumor has run rampant for a month. Today we received official word that Governor Blattner has asked the state legislature to grant a new county seat election to Buffalo County."

Jeff still probed back for Betty, for the happy times. He grudgingly turned half his mind to this gathering. "I guess he can if it's legal," Jeff said.

"Of course it's legal," Thomason said. "What do you plan to do about it?"

"I guess I can vote when the time comes."

"Vote!" Thomason exploded. "Is that all you can think of?"

A gnarled hand rested on Jeff's shoulder and Clem said, "I reckon he ain't all-together with us yet—not in spirit, anyhow."

The parson, a trim, patient man, moved beside Jeff. He said, "Son, those were golden days for you back there, and the grass was green. But it's all fenced off now. You can't go back and climb over that fence. You've got to look ahead for new grassland."

Reluctantly Jeff pushed Betty into the back of his mind. Noding to the parson, he tried to focus on the meeting. He said, "Why do you keep asking me? Why not ask somebody else what to do?"

"Because you're our duly elected mayor," Thomason said.

"Then I quit," Jeff said. "I resign."

"Don't talk nonsense," Thomason said. "You don't rent half a dozen horses a week. You need the mayor's salary. But sometimes you have to earn it."

"I didn't ask for the job."

Thomason levelled a finger at Jeff's nose. "You didn't refuse it, either. Let me remind you, Martin, that the people of Pawnee did you a considerable favor when your buildings and grass burned. You were down and out. You've taken our money for six months. Now I think it's time you made some pretense of being mayor."

"I didn't ask for any favors," Jeff said angrily. "If I'd known this was charity, I'd've turned it down. I don't give a damn about Pawnee or Buffalo County or you or anybody. Why can't you leave me alone?"

"So you can go back to your corn whiskey?" Thomason demanded, eyes snapping fire. "Jeff Martin, you listen to me—"

"Hold on," Clem said, stepping forward, laying the hand on Jeff's shoulder again. He stood beside Jeff and turned him slightly. "Jeff," he said, "do you wanta see this old county bein' run by gamblers and politicians —and the big cattlemen?"

Jeff snapped alert. "You mean Sam Hollister?"

"Maybe," Clem said. "He just might be a big boy in this county if Gunsight won out."

"What's going on, anyhow?" Jeff asked.

THOMASON smiled briefly and relaxed. Removing his spectacles, he polished them with a linen handkerchief. "As you know," he said, "Pawnee has been county seat ever since the territory became a state

TINA HOLLISTER

ten years ago. Now, apparently for no valid reason, it's an open question again."

"But Gunsight?" Jeff said, glancing to Clem, to the parson, back to Thomason. "It's nothing but a wide place in the road."

"How long has it been since you were in Gunsight?" Thomason asked.

Jeff thought a moment. "A year. Maybe longer."

"Apologies, parson," Clem said. "Jeff, Gunsight is wide open hell with the hair on. There's big spreads around there and plenty of punchers that like a town wild and woolly. Tinhorns run it. They say it'll stay wide open."

"Why do they want the county seat?" Jeff asked. "Aren't they asking for trouble?"

"No," Thomason said. He perched his glasses on his nose again. "They're trying to avoid trouble. If they get the county seat, they can buy enough votes to control the sheriff and every county office they want. Gamblers and dancehall girls are pouring in on every stagecoach. Saddletramps are drifting in from everywhere. Gunsight's voting strength grows by the hour."

Jeff glanced around the sober faces. "What can we do?"

"The decision rests primarily with the Arkansas Valley and Southern," Thomason said. "The town that gets the railroad will undoubtedly get the county seat."

"Then what are we worrying about?" Jeff asked. "There's a lot of rough land around Gunsight."

"Surveyors have considered both towns," Thomason said. "I've talked with them. Privately they admit that Pawnee is much preferred. Officially they will say nothing—even though they know that Pawnee will die without the county seat."

Clem voiced everybody's question. "How come they ain't talkin'?"

"I don't know," Thomason said. "Obviously there are things going on which we don't know about. There are lots of questions, too many of them. The big one is why did Governor Blattner throw this thing open again?"

"There's money in Gunsight," Jeff said.

Thomason nodded. "I'm afraid you may be right."

Again Jeff glanced to the faces around him and saw behind the soberness, a hopelessness. He said, "Then what can we do?"

Nobody spoke. Each man looked to his neighbor, to Thomason, to the parson, to Jeff. Shoulders sagged. Eyes mirrored futility. It was like a courtroom trial with friends of the accused already planning his funeral. Jeff's feeble will crumbled. The feeling of hopelessness seeped into him.

Thomason slapped the desk with an open palm. "All right," he said. "Things look bad. But let's not give up before we've started."

"You expect us to buck the governor," somebody asked, "and the whole state legislature?"

"If that's what it amounts to, yes," Thomason said. "If they want to fight, let's fight. Remember, we're not beaten until we lie down and quit. Now everybody go home and think about it. Let's try to come up with a plan."

Again nobody spoke and, for a moment, nobody moved. Then, as though propelled by

some guilt instinct, men stampeded for the door. Jeff was not the last out.

He turned west along Main Street into the flaming face of a sinking sun. With each pace his step slowed, his chin slumped nearer his chest. Fate had thrown up one more insurmountable barrier against him.

Pushing into his lean-to beside the stable, he pitched face-down onto his bunk. Betty lived again in his mind, and he could forget everything else.

He saw her springing down from the stagecoach into his arms, her school-teaching in the East finished now that the JB ranch had become more than a dream. He saw the women of the town hustling her off, clucking over her like so many mother hens, to make her ready. He saw himself pacing up and down in front of the church. He saw them together at the altar, heard her, almost unbelieving, as she vowed to love him forever, remembered the kiss and the rice and the tears and the handshakes and the presents and the two blissful days in their new home.

He wanted the succession of pictures in his mind to stop there, but they didn't. They went marching ahead. He heard the bawling of cattle, heard Betty cry out about the garden. He saw her rush beside him to the door. He saw the new Rocking H stock, Sam Hollister's, overrunning their place. He saw the tired punchers, too near home to care that the cows were making a shambles. He saw Betty run, screaming and waving her apron, toward the garden. But he couldn't see, he still couldn't see or hear what it was that spooked the cattle. Twisting, turning on his bunk, he saw only what happened when the cattle ran.

HE HEARD that sudden, awful silence. He saw Betty halt in her tracks, body rigid, knuckles digging at her mouth. Then he heard that sharp, rumbling thunder, saw the rising dust, heard Betty's scream of terror. He saw himself running uselessly. He saw a puncher swing toward Betty, saw the horse stumble and fall, saw horse and rider scramble out of the way barely in time, heard the scream pitched higher and higher, then choked off as Betty was trampled into the ground.

He saw himself, sobbing, racing blindly at the oncoming cattle. He felt himself flung aside, saw himself rushing hysterically after the herd, dropping matches in the dry grass to start a dozen fires. He saw the wall of flame leap after the wild cattle and punchers.

Jeff sat up on the bunk, his hands groping for another jug. He put it to his lips for a long minute. Setting it down, he found the mental images not drowned, but only made more clear. In one tremendous, tragic picture, he saw everything.

He saw the punchers and every last cow safely beyond the creek. He saw the nervous, fitful wind turning the fire, sweeping a giant, flaming scythe across the landscape, consuming grass, garden, house, corral, buildings, everything, leaving only ashes.

There was only one thing he could not see —the place where Betty had been trampled and burned. Later that day, townspeople found her and buried her, but they wouldn't let him near her. And they found his horses and a few of his cattle, singed and scared, beyond the creek and up in the hills. They moved him to the empty livery stable and built the lean-to. They bought him some clothes and elected him mayor.

Whiskey dribbled down Jeff's chin. He lowered the jug, caught his breath, then drank again. Slowly the pictures began to dim. He drank greedily, desperately. He cursed Sam Hollister, his cattle, his men. With no one to hear, he threatened them with violent death. But he knew his threats were empty. He couldn't shoot a man in cold blood.

His eyes glazed over, slowly closed. His body went limp. The jug thudded to the dirt floor. Jeff toppled sideways onto the bunk and slept.

He awoke trembling, the images of wild and terrible dreams still vivid in his mind. But he awoke with a resolution firmly made at last. Somehow during that agonizing night he had come to a decision. He could not murder Sam Hollister, but he could fight him, and he could try to save the town of Pawnee.

This was the town where he and Betty had been married. Pawnee's folks had been good to him. The pitiful little he had left in the world was here. If Sam Hollister was aiming to grab the county seat for Gunsight, Jeff

would do everything possible to balk him.

He stood up, and his head clanged like a blacksmith's hammer. But he got to the stove, started a fire and put on coffee. Then he groped his way to the horse tank in back and plunged in. Coughing, sputtering, he came up refreshed. He drained the tank and released the windmill's brake. The pump creaked, fresh water gushed into the tank. Jeff sloshed back to the lean-to.

Shivering, he peeled out of his clothes, dried on a piece of towel and dressed. The coffee braced him. He put a skillet on the stove and dumped in bacon and eggs.

As he ate, his head cleared and he knew what he had to do. Without the county seat, and with the railroad going to Gunsight, Pawnee would dry up and blow away. Maybe he could prevent it. Probably the governor was actually an honest man with pressure, so far, only from Gunsight faction. If he heard the Pawnee point of view, he might change his mind.

It was worth gambling on. Jeff would go to the capital and talk with the governor and legislature members and anybody else he could button-hole.

Jeff gulped his breakfast and hurried to select a fast horse for the long ride. He had the saddle-blanket in place when a rider reined up in front of the stable.

"Hello in there. Got some oats and a curry comb?"

JEFF came out of the stall, irritated at the delay, ready to tell the man he was too busy. The rider was already swinging down. A tall, muscled man, he wore black engineer's boots, a flat hat and smooth leather jacket. Nodding to Jeff, he lifted saddle bags from his mount and slung them over his shoulder. Jeff stared at the letters burned into the flap of the bags. A. V. & S. Arkansas Valley & Southern.

"You an Ark Valley man?" Jeff asked.

The man's heavy, sunburned face wrinkled into a friendly grin. "That's right. Name's McCormick."

"Howdy," Jeff said, extending a hand. "I'm Jeff Martin. I'm mayor of Pawnee."

"Howdy yourself," McCormick said, shaking hands. "Figured on looking you up later."

Jeff took reins and led the horse back into a stall. Over his shoulder, he said, "Railroad business bring you to town?"

"That's right," McCormick said, following along.

"I'd like to talk to you about it," Jeff said, off-saddling. "This business with Gunsight has folks pretty worried."

"Yeah," McCormick said, edging away. "Later, maybe. . . ."

Jeff pretended not to notice McCormick's move. He said, "I just don't see how there's any question. I've seen that country east of Gunsight. I'd hate to try to find a horse trail through it—much less a railroad right-of-way."

"Yeah," McCormick said. "Yeah, I guess it's rugged all right."

"Haven't you seen it?"

"I've seen it."

Jeff faced the railroader across the horse's rump. "If the Ark Valley knows what's there, why're they waitin' to build here?"

"I'm sorry, friend," McCormick said. "I can't discuss railroad business with anybody." He turned away.

"Wait a minute," Jeff said. When McCormick paused, Jeff moved around the horse. "Look," he said, "I don't know railroading, but I'd guess it's going to cost the Ark Valley an awful lot of money to put its track to Gunsight instead of here. Will you admit that?"

"Yes," McCormick said. "That's right."

"Why?" Jeff demanded. "Tell me why in blazes anybody'd do such a fool thing."

"I'm sorry," McCormick said, turning away. "I can't talk private business with you."

He had taken two steps when Jeff yelled, "Hold on," and leaped after him, grabbing for his shoulder. McCormick turned suddenly, batting Jeff's arm aside. A big man, the force of his movement tumbled Jeff backwards. He sprawled into a stall.

As Jeff scrambled to his feet, his hand closed on the discarded pitchfork. Gripping it, he lunged forward. McCormick's hand flicked from his side and held a .45. Jeff slid to a stop.

"Like I said," McCormick repeated, "I can't talk business."

"My mistake," Jeff said bitterly, dropping

the fork. "I thought you looked decent."

"Now wait," McCormick said.

"You wait," Jeff raged, ignoring the gun and shouldering past McCormick to stand in the wide doorway. He pointed up the street. "You see this town? It's a quiet town, a peaceful town, a good town to live in. You know what'll happen if Ark Valley builds to Gunsight? People'll lose their homes and their businesses and everything. You say that's railroad business? I say it's everybody's business.

"We need that county seat here. Not just to keep business going. The whole county'll be an owlhoot's roost if the Gunsight crowd takes over."

McCormick sighed heavily and shook his head. "There's nothing I can do."

"There's nothing you can do, because you don't want to do anything."

"That's not right," McCormick said. "I have a job. I just work for people. I have a wife and two little girls back at the end of the track. I'd like to see them go on eating."

"Then tell me who to see," Jeff said. "Who's paying the Ark Valley off? Who gets the graft money?" He paused, knowing he had hoped wrongly about the governor. He said, "Who's payin' Blattner to call the election? Who's going to get rich off the corpse of Pawnee?"

McCormick shrugged and jammed big hands into the pockets of tight riding pants. He said, "I used to think I was decent. I wouldn't want my little girls to hear you talking to me like that. But I've got a job to hang on to."

"Then I'm sorry for you," Jeff said, spitting the words. "While you hang on to your nice, safe job, I hope you don't keep thinking about Pawnee and the folks here. You won't sleep so good if you do."

McCORMICK shook his head again and moved away. Halfway into the street, he turned and came back. He said, "All right. If it costs me my job, I can blame you for it, but at least I'll sleep. You can take it for what it's worth. Governor Blattner is a major stockholder of Ark Valley."

"Blattner?" Jeff said. "Okay, you go back and tell your bosses that we've got spies here in Pawnee. Tell them we know about Blattner. Tell them we think the federal judge might be interested."

McCormick almost smiled. "You might have something there. But my bosses didn't get where they are by being dumb. They wouldn't swallow that spy business. And if I tell 'em, they'll know how you found out." He sliced a finger across his throat and smiled. "That'd finish me good."

He touched the brim of his hat, turned and strode up the street. Watching the railroader out of sight, Jeff speculated wildly. He had spoken in haste, without thought. But now he wondered.

The fact that Blattner had kept his Ark Valley interests so secret indicated that there might be something illegal about the whole operation. Certainly it was anything but ethical for a public official to use his influence for private gain. If the maneuvering was illegal, the U.S. district judge might be a great deal more than interested. Jeff knew little of legal matters. But he had heard of injunctions and writs. Maybe.

But no. To bring the affair into the open would be to risk the life of a decent man. And McCormick was decent, really. He was a man with a wife and family. He had tied no strings to his information. But Jeff couldn't sacrifice one man to save others.

Still he had the information. And he sincerely hoped there was more than one way to skin a skunk like Blattner, a way to block the trail of treachery that led all the way to the state capital.

He hadn't been to Gunsight in a long time. Maybe he could learn something there. He had barely passed through the place. Folks there wouldn't know him. With the constant influx of strangers, he'd never be noticed.

Turning, he hurried to the lean-to and sorted through his meager wardrobe. He was able to assemble an outfit of white shirt, string tie, striped pants and dark coat.

Selecting a tall, black stallion, Jeff saddled, mounted and rode out of town. It was fifteen miles to Gunsight over good stage road and the stallion needed exercise. It didn't take long.

Jeff had expected a grown town, but he

wasn't prepared for what he found. A year before Gunsight had been a stage relay station. Now it boasted a full-fledged main street with the gaudy false fronts of saloons and dancehalls crowding out most respectable businesses.

A sign proclaimed the main street to be Railroad Avenue, intersected in the middle by Trail Street. A block of new buildings extended to each side of Trail Street along the avenue. Beyond, at both ends, tent villages attested to the boom-or-bust attitude of the citizenry. Jeff noted few new homes to match the business growth. But, then, Gunsight's new citizens weren't home builders. They were there to make a fast dollar. New saloons were going up and new tents beside them. Freight wagons rumbled along the streets hauling food and liquor supplies and gambling equipment.

THREADING through the traffic, Jeff dismounted at a tie-rail and made his way into the shiny Railroad Bar. He bellied up to an ornate mahogany bar and ordered whiskey from a lank, cadaverous bartender. He stood then, staring at the drink. Glancing up, he saw the bartender watching him.

"Howdy," Jeff said. "Busy town you've got here."

The owlish eyes blinked. The hollow voice said, "Yeah."

"Got room for another gambler hereabouts?"

The bartender coughed and wiped the back of a hand across his mouth. "If the track crew hits here," he said, "all the gamblers in the country couldn't take it as fast as them yahoos'll wanta get rid of it."

"I'd like that," Jeff said. "Figured maybe I'd put up my own place. Who do I see to buy a piece of land?"

"You loco?" The bartender laughed—or started to. He got out one chuckle, then doubled over coughing. The hacking seemed to rattle every bone in his emaciated body. Abruptly, then, he straightened and wiped his mouth.

"You can rent a piece of land on the avenue to fit whatever you want to put up. Can't rent no bigger, and you can't buy nothin' any size for no amount."

"That's a hell of a way to do business," Jeff said.

"Take it or leave it," the bartender said. "Gents that own the land are callin' the play."

"Who might they be?"

He had asked the question as casually as possible, but the owl eyes blinked too quickly. The thin lips clamped shut. Then the hint of a smile crinkled at the corners of the mouth.

"You ask a lot of questions for a stranger," the bartender said.

"That's my worry," Jeff said. "I've got three freight wagons coming in and I want a place to unload and set up shop. I asked you once. Who're the gents callin' the play?"

The bartender shrugged and said, "George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry."

Jeff slapped the shot glass aside and reached for the bartender. The man eased back just far enough.

"You trying to make a fool of me?" Jeff demanded.

"You'll do that your own self, you stay in town long enough. You asked me, I told you. Gents got an office across the street."

Cursing, Jeff slammed a coin to the bar and stomped out. He slapped the bat-wing aside and stepped through. There, opposite him, a sign read, "Washington, Jefferson & Henry, Land Agents."

Jeff glanced back. Leaning against the bar, clutching his chest, the bartender tried to laugh. Jeff faced the street and considered the sign a moment. Things were crazy, but there was only one way to find out what was going on.

Stepping into the street, he dodged around a freight wagon and a fancy buggy and reached the other side. He pushed through a screen door, then paused to consider the office. Roomy enough, it was almost bare. A county map adorned one wall above a rolltop desk, where a wrinkled and stooped little man worked. His chair, a long table and a spitoon were the only other furnishings. Not even a stove, Jeff noted.

"I suppose you're George Washington?" he said, leaning on the long table.

The old man turned to peer at Jeff. An astonishing mane of white hair almost hid his green eyeshade. He stood wearily.

"I'm Isaiah Sims," he said. "Somethin' I can do for you?"

"I want to buy a piece of land to set up a gambling hall."

The old man snorted and turned away. "You say a fool thing like that, you ain't been in town long enough to know where'd be a good place." He sat again in his swivel chair.

"I heard there was no land for sale," Jeff said. "Figured maybe somebody was kidding me."

"It's no joke," Sims said. "They own the land. They'll rent, but they won't sell a clod."

"When will George Washington and the others get back? I thought maybe I could change their minds," Jeff said. "Sure hate to sink cash on rented ground."

Sims shook his head vigorously. "T'ain't no use, son. Others've tried." He inspected Jeff and added pointedly, "Others with more cash than you'll ever see."

"They own it all?"

"Yep."

"How'd they do it? The Homestead Act doesn't give a man more'n a quarter section."

"Isaiah Sims," the old man said, "does his work and draws his pay. You, boy, better look out. Gents have died real sudden in this town for askin' lots less about less important folks."

"This George Washington makes big tracks?"

"Nobody in these parts makes bigger."

"Anybody else got land for sale?"

"Sure." Sims gnawed the end off a tobacco plug. "Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry."

"Ever met your employers?"

"Long as they pay me I don't care to. Their money spends good."

"How much land've they got?"

Sims aimed at the spitoon and missed. "We got a new livery stable up at the end of Railroad Avenue. You climb up on top of it and take a look. You won't lay eyes on a pebble the boys don't own."

"Maybe I'd better find me a different camp," Jeff said, moving suddenly toward the door.

"Maybe you better, son." Sims swiveled around to his desk, his words barely distinguishable. "You've maybe asked too many questions already."

JEFF drifted out the door and down the new boardwalk a way. In the few minutes he'd talked with Sims traffic seemed to have doubled. More wagons of all sizes moved up and down the avenue. Hip-shot horses clustered at saloon tie-rails. Gaudily dressed girls promenaded in the late afternoon sun. Unwashed punchers, just off the range with a month's pay burning their pockets, eyed the girls covertly. Gamblers, flashily dressed and worldly wise, squinted against daylight and moved along the street with studied unconcern.

Two things struck Jeff instantly. He hadn't seen a child since he hit town—or even a man or woman who gave the slightest impression of being a family person. The other observation was less noticeable, but more menacing.

Without unnecessary staring, Jeff had located at least half a dozen gunslingers. He was certain of his identification. Their clothes were cleaner than the punchers', shirt elbows not worn like the gamblers'. Always they had hunted and hunting eyes, and hands never straying far from the polished grips of a Colt or Remington.

Half a dozen gunhawks were about average for a new camp like this, Jeff figured. But the gunmen themselves weren't average. Turn six mad dogs loose in the same pen and there was bound to be some chewing. That's what made these killers interesting, Jeff decided.

Why weren't they bellied up to the same bar exaggerating their kills? Why wasn't one dogging another into a fight for the sake of excitement and an enlarged reputation? Or why didn't a couple of them team up to hoorah the whole town? The reason, Jeff guessed, was all part of a mighty big play—a play that ran along that trail of treachery all the way back to the state capital.

Just how big the play was, Jeff could only make a wild guess. Governor Blattner had to be in on it. And there were men with money and influence who could ignore the laws and lay claim to land that had never been homesteaded. Maybe a whole railroad was involved. And somebody had imported the gunslicks for protection against something.

The immensity of it and the mystery of it scared Jeff. How could he buck even one of those gunslingers, much less all of them, plus

the men of power who had hired them? And how could he possibly plan an attack against men unless he knew who they were? How could he prevent Gunsight winning the county seat when it already claimed enough voters to make the outcome certain.

Who were George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry? Powerful and wealthy men, obviously. One of them, Jeff guessed, was Governor Blattner. That meant at least one official of both the government and the railroad was involved with this land swindle. No sales, just rentals. That added up to a lot of valuable property when the railroad pushed to Gunsight. But there was one curious aspect of the deal. If Blattner owned all or part of that land, would he play both ends against the middle by bleeding the railroad for that same expensive land?

Jeff felt a little dizzy from trying to figure all the angles. Shaking his head, he took out makings and watched the bustling town. It was only late afternoon and already saloons and gambling halls were busy. As Jeff watched, a drunken puncher wobbled from a saloon across the street, reeled along the boardwalk and pitched headlong in front of a mercantile doorway. Passersby barely took notice of him. A bored gunslinger moved close to the drunk and considered him for a long moment.

Jeff pulled at his smoke, flipped it away and dodged into the stream of traffic. He had found out about enough for one day. He'd better get back to Pawnee, repeat his information and see if anybody had an idea.

He reached his horse at the tie-rail and was untying the reins when he heard the quick, startled cry. Turning, he saw a girl tumbling across the drunken puncher. Packages sprayed across the boardwalk. The girl hit the boards hard.

Jeff sprang up the walk to the girl. Bending beside her, he heard a man laugh. He knew it was the gunhawk without looking. But in the moment he hesitated, the girl was scrambling to her feet. He found himself gazing at her and hearing the brittle laugh again.

"You're pretty slow, Sir Lancelot," the man said.

Jeff ignored him and stood. The girl, blushing violently, smoothed out her calico dress and patted at her long, brown hair. She gave Jeff a quick, grateful smile. She was a slender girl, almost his height, with bright, brown eyes and firm, determined features.

UNDER the smile, Jeff felt his own face flame. Turning away, he bent to the drunk, seized a handful of belt and shirt and lugged the man to the edge of the boardwalk. He faced around and saw that the gunslinger had moved a step closer. The man laughed again.

"Thank you," the girl said. "I should have been watching where I was going. But I had my arms full of packages."

"Are you hurt?" Jeff asked.

She shook her head and smiled warmly. Jeff turned and began picking up her scattered parcels. When his arms were full he straightened to face the gunslinger.

"You run ahead with the lady's things," the man said. "I'll walk her home."

"You'll do no such thing," the girl said, moving around him. She took some of the packages from Jeff and hooked an arm through his. "I'll tell you which way," she said.

The gunslinger moved past her, shouldered against Jeff and dumped his load of packages. Backing several steps, he laughed and waited. Jeff hadn't realized how bored a gunslinger could get just waiting for some action. Anything to start a fight—any kind of a fight—especially to impress a pretty girl.

"Pick 'em up and run on like I told you," the man said.

"Monte Mainnard," the girl said, "you leave us alone."

The swarthy gunman swept his hat from his head and black hair glistened in the sunlight. He bowed extravagantly and said, "Why, Miss Tina, I'm only lookin' out for you. This here jasper's a plumb stranger. You don't even know him."

"Name's Jeff Martin. Now she knows me. And I guess it's up to her who totes her packages."

"Sonny," Mainnard said, "I told you to pick up her things and run on. Maybe you want to argue about it."

Jeff had bent for a package. Now he straightened and smiled at the gunslinger. "I may or may not be yellow," he said, "but I've

sure got sense enough not to draw on you. So you can call me all the things you want to, and it'll just go in one ear and out the other."

"Why, you stinkin' little weasel," Mainnard exploded.

"Isn't it awful?" Jeff said.

"You sneakin', dirty, side-windin', chicken-stealin' coyote."

"I sure am," Jeff admitted happily.

Tina giggled, tried to stifle it, then doubled over with laughter. "Pick up my parcels, Mainnard," she said. "You may walk with me after all."

"You yellow-bellied rat," Mainnard roared at Jeff. "You gonna make a play?"

"Gosh, no," Jeff said.

Tina sucked a quick breath and burst it out in new gales of laughter. Jeff caught his breath and held it. He knew the gunslinger had been prodded almost too far. Vivid red boiled into Mainnard's face. His short, lean frame went rigid. His right hand clenched spasmodically beside his gun.

"Oh, hell," he muttered, wheeling, stalking away.

Tina's laugh broke off and she leaned heavily on Jeff's arm, her face pale. "That was too close," she said.

"Yeah," Jeff agreed, his knees weak.

"Next time you run into him," Tina said, "you run. He's been in town a week. He's already killed one man and shot up two more. He's black, ugly mean."

Jeff bent and retrieved the packages. Straightening, he said, "Let's forget Mr. Mainnard and get you home before something else happens. And what's such a pretty girl doing in a place like Gunsight?"

"This way," she said, nodding up the street. "I'm the school-teacher."

"In Gunsight?" Jeff strode beside her. "Where? I haven't seen a building—or any kids."

"We have a tent," she said. "And we don't allow children on the streets. That's the gamblers' order. They want to protect their own children. That's what I teach mostly, and a few youngsters from ranches."

"Must be a fine town to raise a family," Jeff observed.

"It's terrible," Tina said, "and the gamblers are the first to admit it. But that's their business, and they want their children educated. They pay me well."

"Isn't it bad for the local kids?"

"Yes. We'll run school twelve months of the year to try to keep them off the streets and out of trouble, but—" She broke off as they stepped down to cross Trail Street. On the other side, she added, "It'll be the ruination of them."

"Too much bad influence?"

TINA nodded and shifted her packages to rest her arms. "This was a quiet place. It's too wild and too soon. The local kids didn't have time to grow into it. Just all of a sudden they're in the middle of killings and gambling and drinking and those painted hussies, and they think it's exciting. They idolize those cheap gamblers. Half the boys in my school worship Monte Mainnard."

"That's bad," Jeff said.

"It's awful. But there's no law for them to respect. In Gunsight the law is a big joke. Pawnee is some place a long way off and Sheriff Hoad is somebody they know as a stumbling old man everybody laughs at. These kids are nursed on corruption and weaned on gunfighting."

Jeff shifted his load of packages. "You're one person, I guess, who'd be glad to see Gunsight cleaned up."

"Yes, I am," she said, "but there aren't many who'll agree with me. I don't want the railroad or the county seat here. Pawnee's the right place for them. It's a town—solid and well established. It can handle them. But this is no town. This is—this is hell, wide open and woolly."

She turned off on a side street then and didn't speak again until she came to one of the many tents a block off Railroad Avenue. Jeff could see the crude benches inside. But Tina circled the larger tent to a small one behind it.

"This is where I live," she said.

"In this town?" Jeff asked. "With no doors to lock?"

"I haven't had any trouble," she said. "Oddly enough, a woman is safe here."

Jeff put down the packages near the tent flap. "Maybe there's something that can be done," he said. "something for you and your

*Jeff was helping the girl pick up her packages when she heard a man laugh*

school and something for the town, too."

"Do you really think so?" Tina asked, whirling to him.

And then he knew that something had to be done. Even the hope of improvement brightened the sparkle in her eyes, warmed the quick smile.

Dropping her packages, she took his hands. "Oh," she said, "is there something? Can you do something?"

"I can," he said, believing it, "and I will."

"Oh, Mr. Martin."

And she squeezed his hands, warmly, enthusiastically, her eyes, her face glowing. Then she stepped back, coloring again, gazing at him in genuine surprise. Whirling away, she darted into the tent. The flap swung behind her.

Jeff could only stand there grinning, remembering her warmth, her sparkle, her enthusiasm and sincerity. For Tina, if for no other reason, he had to accomplish something.

He turned away finally and hurried back to his horse. Mounting, he remembered his mission, his possible enemies. He left town to the east and rode completely out of sight before beginning a wide circle to the north. The sharp, bright picture of Tina moved ahead of him all the way to Pawnee.

It was night when Jeff rode into Pawnee. His stomach craved food, and he swung the stallion toward the hotel. But beyond he saw horses crowding a tie-rail at the courthouse and light spilling from the sheriff's office. Rubbing at his empty stomach, he kneed the stallion on down the street and dismounted.

Jeff found some of the same crowd that had met in the sheriff's office the day before—Thomason and the parson and Clem Highsmith and some others. But this time Sheriff Hoad sat at his own desk, looking like a tired old bull badgered by a pack of yapping dogs.

"Sheriff," Thomason was saying as Jeff eased inside, "it's not just the logical way, it's the only way open to us now. And it's every bit as legal as a new election. More so."

"Sounds plumb square to me," Clem said.

"And extremely dangerous," the parson added. "Personally, gentlemen, I think it's asking a great deal."

"Of course it's dangerous," Thomason said. "But isn't that what we've been paying Hoad for? Ten years he's been our sheriff—ten years of drawing our pay."

Hoad faced the group wearily, his great body sagging, plainly feeling too keenly his years and his responsibility. Abruptly he yanked off his hat, threw it to his desk and mopped perspiration from his brow and his close-cropped grey hair.

"Sure I been sheriffin' for a spell," he said defensively, "and no man can say I ain't done my job."

"Two-bit rustlers," Thomason said, "and a couple of tinhorns."

THE parson regarded Thomason soberly and said, "I believe Sheriff Hoad has kept Buffalo County admirably clean and trouble-free. You're asking too much. We have elected and re-elected an honest lawman—not a fancy gunfighter."

"It's not a matter of asking," Thomason persisted, emphasizing each point with a jab of the pince-nez. "It's a clear matter of duty. And if everybody here is so interested in having our sheriff re-elected, may I point out that he won't stand a chance, if the Gunsight crowd beats us out."

"By golly," Clem said, "that's right."

"Of course it's right," Thomason said. "We all saw what happened when we asked our mayor to take action. It's fine of our community to give these civil jobs to persons in need of jobs. But there comes a time when we are the persons in need and our charitable acts fly in our faces."

Jeff shouldered through the crowd. "I told you if I'd known it was charity I wouldn't have accepted." He moved beside Hoad and faced the others. "But just because I did accept—and because Hoad let himself be talked into running again—you haven't got the right to ask us to commit suicide."

"It's the only way," Thomason insisted. "Here we have one ace we can play. We can send a lawman to Gunsight to enforce the county regulations regarding saloons and gambling and dancehalls. Only our mayor is useless and our sheriff is afraid."

"Thomason!" the parson said. "That's enough."

"It's all right," Jeff said, leaning back against Hoad's desk and taking out makings. "Thomason's got a right to holler, I guess. But this time he's wrong. I spent most of today finding out things about this proposition."

"What could you have learned?" Thomason asked. "What could you have found out that would interest us?"

Jeff grinned. He said, "Would it interest you to know that Governor Blattner is a large stockholder of Ark Valley?"

The group exploded with the governor's name, jabbered excitedly and in some disbelief. Before they could recover, Jeff gave them more.

"Would it interest you to know that three men, using ficticious names, have acquired all the land in and around Gunsight? And would it also interest you to know that somebody has hired at least half a dozen gunslingers to keep us from upsetting the applecart?"

Again the group buzzed. Jeff explained in more detail about his visit to Gunsight. He failed to mention only his morning meeting with McCormick, the Ark Valley man. His information was like a bucket of cold water thrown over the assemblage. It even washed some of the starch out of Thomason.

"Our enemy is well armed," the banker said. "Do you have any plans?"

"Just one fool notion," Jeff said. "I want to know whether there's any law that says I can't hold a county job along with being mayor."

Hoad shook his head. "Never heard of it if there is."

"What's this notion?" Thomason asked.

"It strikes me," Jeff said, "that Sheriff Hoad has been entirely too efficient. He's always handled things by himself, and we've never had to give him a deputy. Right now he can't forget the rest of the county and go to Gunsight. A deputy could. If he'll deputize me, I'll go and see what laws I can enforce."

"You'll go?" Thomason said.

"Hold on, boy," Clem said. "You ain't no gunfighter."

"I know I'm not," Jeff admitted. "But one thing my daddy taught me was to use a rifle and a shotgun. A scattergun's a good argument in town." He glanced at Hoad and asked, "Will you swear me in?"

Hoad in turn peered around the crowded room. Finally he shrugged. "I reckon so."

Silence pressed into the room then, brittle and expectant. Clearly, most of the men figured Jeff was buying his cemetery plot. And probably the others gave him less than no chance. But a minute later he moved out to his horse, a shiny badge gleaming on his shirt. A few men stayed behind to talk. Most of them headed for home.

Jeff's confidence remained with him while he ate at the hotel and until he had put up the stallion. Then, alone in the bleak lean-to, he began to wonder. He began to think.

It didn't take him long to figure it out. He'd been plumb loco. Sure he had reasons, but too many of them had ganged up on him at the same time to drown his common sense. Sam Hollister was at the bottom of it. There probably wasn't a thing in the world Jeff wouldn't do to settle his score with that rancher. But this was a pretty roundabout way to get Hollister. He'd been too bitter, too eager for revenge.

But that wasn't all of it. He had only begun to dig into the mess. He hadn't even started to make any plans. He had seen Monte Mainnard and those other gunslicks. He should have known better. But there had been Tina. That was the big trouble. He had wanted to appear heroic in her eyes.

And that wasn't logical either. How could he still want Sam Hollister's scalp for Betty's death if he was now interested enough in another girl to risk six killers and a whole hostile town?

The whole move was crazy. Why had he talked so big? Why had he even thought he could tackle such an involved and contrived situation? Who was he, a lousy livery stable owner, to buck the governor's combine, a railroad and hired killers? Why hadn't he, this time, stayed drunk and out of trouble?

He had a too-clear picture of himself in his new role of deputy. Those gunslicks might let him get as far as Railroad Avenue. Then what good would be his rifle or even his shotgun? They'd gun him down like a mad dog, without a chance for him, without a risk for them. A day later he'd be forgotten—by the town and even by Tina.

But he'd made his talk, his big blabbermouthed talk. The folks of Pawnee were counting on him. He couldn't turn back. They'd been good to him. If he let them down, he'd have to get out. And there was no place to go, nothing else to do.

A HIGH, slanting sun woke him in the morning. He shoved off the bunk, ate, dressed and saddled the black stallion. It was near noon when he rode out of town.

It was easy for Jeff to blank his mind to everything but his own miseries as he rode nearer Gunsight. But the ride couldn't last forever. Too soon he was topping the rocky rise north of town.

He reined up, gazing before him. Sighing, he shook his head, then snagged the rifle from its boot. He checked it and his sixgun, a quick inspection. He wondered idly whether Gunsight had a decent cemetery and a minister to give him a religious burial. Then he rode on to Gunsight.

From that point he barely gave himself time to think. He rode directly to Railroad Avenue, tied the stallion, buffed up his badge, cradled the shotgun and kicked through the batwings of the Railroad Saloon.

"This place is closed," he announced, swinging the scattergun toward his friend, the cadaverous bartender. "The operation of games of chance is in violation of the laws of Buffalo County. The sheriff's office orders you closed until such time as you may appear before a suitable judiciary body for trial on the preferred charges."

By the time Jeff paused for breath, the lank

barkeep was leaning on the bar, mouth agape. Of a dozen early customers, twelve had fled. They might sneer at the law and laugh at the badge. They didn't argue with the shotgun.

Jeff watched the bartender begin pulling shades and closing doors and shutters. Then he moved on. He got two more places closed before the word began to spread ahead of him. By then he was so puffed up with his power and success he didn't notice that his commands were met with patient smiles and obeyed with furtive laughter.

Even the dancehall girls and the gamblers he caught in operation put up little fuss at being arrested. Jeff found a solid storeroom to lock them in and went back to his closings.

It was suppertime when he turned onto Railroad Avenue again. He paused a moment to admire his accomplishments. Every illegal establishment on the north side of the street was closed. In another couple of hours he'd have Gunsight as virtuous as a Puritan bride. Already a tomblike silence had engulfed the north side of the avenue. On the south side people saw his badge, his shotgun and gave him plenty of room.

"Jeff!"

He spun to the sound. Across the street Tina tucked up her skirts and ran toward him. Watching her, Jeff knew that what ever risk he had taken had been worth while. Maybe he had been showing off, like a small boy, as Monte Mainnard had tried to do yesterday. But Tina was impressed.

"You!" she said, breathing heavily as she stepped up onto the boardwalk. "Jeff, you're the deputy everybody's talking about! You're the one who's been closing up everything?"

"That's right," he said proudly. "The folks at Pawnee didn't think it could be done."

"It can't," she said. She glanced up and down the street, then tugged him back into a doorway. Again her gaze flicked along the street. Her hand tightened on his arm, telegraphing the fear that clamped upon her, etching deep furrows around eyes and mouth.

"Jeff," she said at last, "you're not beating anybody. They're playing cat-and-mouse with you."

He grinned at her apprehension. "The question is, who's the cat? I've closed down ten places, and I've got a dozen people locked up. I'd say the mouse had the cats in the trap."

"You don't understand," she said, still peering to the street, her voice unsteady. "All over town they're laughing at you and at what they're going to do to you. You're all alone. You can't stop them."

"I have so far," he said, not sure of himself now.

"But they've been letting you." She faced him now and took his hands. "Jeff, you've got to get out of Gunsight. Now. Get your horse and ride out as fast as you can."

"No," he said. "I'm sorry, Tina, but I can't quit a job before it's finished. I came here to—"

A FLURRY of shots cut him off. He wheeled and peered up Trail Street in time to see the storehouse door swing open and the imprisoned girls and gamblers flock into the street laughing. He swung the shotgun up. A rifle cracked and his hat darted up from his head.

"Get away from me," he shouted to Tina.

He spun back to the sound of the rifle. Along the street gunfire crackled. Bullets sang past him, kicking up dirt and splinters at his feet, tugging at his shirt and vest. He saw Tina cringe, stare wildly around her, then back into a doorway.

He whirled around. Down Trail Street the dancehall girls had scattered. The handful of gamblers darted for cover, each of them armed now. More bullets whined past Jeff.

Wheeling, he sprinted four strides toward a spring wagon parked at a tie-rail. He dived off the boardwalk beneath the wagon.

All along the row of store fronts guns flashed and roared at him. Bullets spurted dust into his face, his hair, his clothes, and ricocheted, whining off the wagon, spitting splinters at him.

Opposite him he saw men dive behind a water barrel. Whipping up the shotgun, he triggered once. The water barrel shattered to toothpicks, spewing water into the street. The two men sprang up and raced for new cover. In frantic frustration, Jeff swung the shotgun after them and jerked the other trigger. Buckshot plowed gullies in the dirt behind the men.

Hastily he patted the pockets of his shirt,

vest, pants. Cursing, he repeated the process. Had he forgotten extra shotgun shells or had he lost them? He couldn't remember. He flung the scattergun down and hauled out his .45.

Now riflemen sniped at him from rooftops, from second story windows, from vantage points beyond his gun's effective range. And nearer, men darted from posts to water barrels to doorways to water troughs in an ever-tightening circle around him. He snapped quick shots at them, coming close, but never scoring. When his gun clicked empty he reloaded from his belt.

And still the riflemen threw lead at him, keeping him down, keeping him dodging underneath the wagon. And still the men moved in closer, drawing the noose ever tighter, moving too quickly in the lengthening shadows to give him a target, laughing at him when he missed. And he cursed himself for leaving the Winchester back with the black stallion.

Then suddenly his gun clicked empty. He pawed at his belt. Every loop was empty. Peering wildly around, he saw the circle of men closing. At any instant that final fusillade would cut him down. But he wasn't quite finished yet.

Holstering the sixgun, he grabbed the shotgun by the barrels and lurched from under the wagon. Men sprang into the open. Whooping, they swarmed upon him from all sides, like a pack of coyotes attacking a wounded horse, like vultures swooping upon a dying animal. Pivoting, he swung the shotgun wildly. With one wild yell, the men overran him and beat him down.

Instantly his arms were yanked behind him and tied. He felt himself lifted off the ground and wondered if they would lynch him or shoot him.

Then arms encased him from head to feet, sealing him up like a caterpillar in a cocoon. He couldn't move a muscle or scarcely breathe. Blindly he could feel the movement of the men, could hear their shouts, their hilarious laughter. The motion continued for a time, then stopped. As hands shifted on his face, Jeff had a glimpse of his horse.

Then the hands tightened on him. One of his boots was yanked off. Then the other. He felt a fumbling at his belly and his gunbelt fell away. Then as the men roared and hooted, his pants slid down over his hips, his knees, his feet.

Somewhere a woman screamed. Off in the distance men shouted and guns roared.

Again the encircling hands shifted. Jeff felt himself being swung to the rhythm of a shouted count. Abruptly the hands let go. Jeff sailed up, over, down. He landed hard, straddling the stallion's saddle.

Before he could steady himself, his feet had been seized and lashed by a rope that passed under the horse's belly. Then the men fell back, pointing, whooping, slapping each other in their hilarity. And as Jeff raised his head he saw the street lined with people—gamblers, dancehall girls, bartenders, punchers, storekeepers—all pointing to him, all laughing fit to fall off the boardwalk.

The stallion moved then. Jeff peered down. As the horse turned into the street, out of the crowd, it was Monte Mainnard who held the reins. He glanced back to Jeff and laughed.

"My, my," he said, clucking loudly, "look what happened to our big, bad lawman. What do you say we mosey up past the corner so the schoolmarm can get a good look at you?"

The crowd within earshot whooped approval of that. Mainnard laughed and guided the stallion up the street.

THE derisive cry of the mob echoed all up and down the street, the sound tearing at Jeff's ears, knifing through him, heaping fires of hate and humiliation upon the coals of bitterness which had smouldered for so long.

Abruptly the horse halted and Mainnard called, "Here we are, lawman. Take a good look at your hero, Miss Tina."

Some bitter compulsion forced Jeff to look at her. She stood in the same doorway, backed into the farthest corner. But she had buried her face in her hands and her shoulders shook with racking sobs.

Her sorrow and shame reached across the boardwalk to Mainnard. He wheeled about, turned the horse to face up Trail Street, tossed reins over the saddle horn and slapped the horse's rump. The stallion, spooked by all the commotion, pitched and lunged. Jeff fought for balance, his feet tied, his hands lashed

behind him. For an instant he almost plunged beneath the frightened horse's hoofs.

Then the stallion settled into a hard gallop and Jeff flung himself forward. His head banged the saddlehorn, but he held it there and levered his helpless body squarely into the saddle. By the time he could sit up again, Gunsight and the hooting people were well behind him.

For a moment Jeff struggled with the rope that bound his wrists. It gave a little, but not enough. Bending low, he spoke to the stallion, slowing him, stopping him gently. And then Jeff went to work on the rope.

He sawed at it, pulled at it, tugged at it, pinched at it. He peeled skin and bent fingers till he wondered if they'd ever straighten out. But finally he loosened the knot.

Jerking his hands free, he massaged them briefly, then bent down to untie his feet. Finally he hauled up the reins and kneed the horse into motion.

And then it all piled in on him at once—the bitterness, the humiliation, the failure. If he'd had guns and ammunition he'd have gone back and gunned down the whole town until they'd filled him so full of lead he couldn't stand up any longer.

That made him wonder why he was still alive. Killing would have been easier, but a great deal less effective. And certainly at least one man would have welcomed the chance to kill. Monte Mainnard had been shamed the day before. And he was used to settling such things with his gun.

But not this time. This time orders had come from higher up. To kill Jeff might have been to rile the whole county at the wrong time, to point up the lawlessness of Gunsight. To ridicule him, to snatch his pants and publicly shame him, was to score heavily against all of Pawnee's hopes.

Who would vote for a man who couldn't hang onto his pants, even when the alternative was a wide open town? Probably only Pawnee's most loyal citizens. Jeff had played right into a stacked deck to make a complete fool of himself. If Governor Blattner or George Washington or whoever it was had paid Jeff for his efforts, he couldn't have more effectively aided Gunsight's plans. Pawnee's people would not be proud of him.

Well, by thunder, they wouldn't hear it in some devious, round-about way. He'd tell them himself.

He spurred the black to a long lope and guided him along the darkening road. Before long the scattered lights of Pawnee appeared out of the dusk. Jeff pushed the stallion down the long slope, circled wide and came into the stable from the rear. He paused in the lean-to just long enough to fetch pants and boots. Then he mounted and rode up Main Street to the saloon.

Striding inside, he bellied up and demanded, "Whiskey."

THE bartender poured and set the glass of whiskey on the bar. Before Jeff could put the glass to his lips, boots pounded up the board-walk outside. Jeff put the glass down and turned. Men streamed through the batwings. Thomason was in the lead.

"We saw your horse," he said, moving toward the bar. "What happened?"

"Everything," Jeff said.

The townsmen fanned into a semi-circle facing him. Most of the same ones were in the group again.

"What did you accomplish?" Thomason asked.

"Nothing," Jeff said. "Nothing good, anyhow."

Thomason glanced about him, giving the men his grimly satisfied superiority. To Jeff he said, "I knew you were biting off more than you could chew. Did they lock you up or throw you out?"

"Neither," Jeff said. "I closed up half the town, and then they ran me out."

His announcement hit them like a kick in the belly. Mouths flapped open and eyes bugged. Then, not mentioning Tina, Jeff told them what had happened. The amazement of his listeners soon gave way to concern, then worry, then hopelessness.

"We're whipped," Clem said.

"We're not either," Thomason said. "All we need is a lawman with a little guts and gumption."

"Banker," Sheriff Hoad said from the back of the group, "There ain't a lawman in this whole country who could go into Gunsight and get out again if they didn't want him

to. We're just dang lucky all they wanted to do was make a fool out of Jeff—otherwise he'd've come back here without his scalp instead of without his britches."

"He just wasn't man enough," Thomason said.

"Maybe you are," Hoad said. "You been hollerin' a good fight ever since this ruckus started. How about you goin' down to Gunsight and cleanin' it up?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Thomason said.

"I ain't," Hoad said, "but you sure are."

"Amen to that," Jeff said. "We haven't got men or guns to hurt Gunsight. They'd wipe us off the map."

"Would you rather die slowly?" Thomason asked. "I say if we're cashing in, let's go down fighting. And I mean myself, too."

Clem chuckled. "Darned if I wouldn't about go along with that."

"Hold on, men." It was the parson, pushing through the group, backing up beside Jeff. "There's no call for us all to rush right out and commit suicide. Now think of it a little. If we can't crash through a stone wall, let's try to figure a way to climb over it or go around it. Think of it this way. We have tried without success to fight fire with fire. Now let's find a way to fight fire with water or with wind or with shovels or with anything at our command."

"Somebody should be able to think of something," Jeff said.

"Sure," Hoad said, trying to sound hopeful. "Let's everybody go home and sleep on it. Maybe we'll think of somethin'."

"Thomason?" Jeff asked.

The banker shrugged angrily. "Oh, all right. Apparently there's no other way to handle it."

He turned away from the group and stalked toward the door. Jeff smiled his appreciation to the parson, to Clem, to Hoad. The four of them moved away from the bar. They had taken only a few steps when the roar of a .45 slashed through the silent night.

Thomason halted, frozen, his hands on the bat-wings. Abruptly he swung around, eyes wide with fear, and then bolted to the rear of the saloon.

"Up the street," Hoad said, rushing forward.

Jeff passed him, crashed through the bat-wings and dashed to the middle of the street. The others poured out of the saloon behind him. Up at the far end of the street a horse reared and a man laughed. For an instant horse and rider were dimly silhouetted against the dark, moonless sky. The rider slapped his hat against the horse's flank, and the animal plunged into the consuming darkness.

"He's headed for rocks and timber," Jeff said as lights flickered on across town. "We could never track him."

"There!" Hoad said. "Look."

Near the end of Main Street a shadowy figure lurched away from a porch post. It was a man, a wounded man. He waved feebly, and fought to stay on his feet.

Jeff was already running and the others pounded behind him. He sprinted up the street as the wounded man reeled, swayed. He was folding over, on the brink of collapse, when Jeff caught him.

"McCormick!" Jeff cried.

The Ark Valley man swayed heavily against Jeff. The parson, then Clem and Hoad came at a dead run. Others of the group straggled behind. Thomason was not in sight.

"Somebody get the sawbones!" Jeff shouted.

"No—no time," McCormick gasped. "Put me down. Got to—got to tell you—"

His voice choked off with a strangling sound. Blood trickled from a corner of his mouth. Jeff glanced to the parson. The parson shook his head, knelt in the dirt and took a Testament from a coat pocket. Jeff eased McCormick down flat.

"Who shot you?" Jeff asked.

McCORMICK passed a dry tongue across parched lips. A spasm of pain twisted his face, his body.

"Who was it?" Jeff asked. "Who gunned you?"

"Monte—Monte Mainnard," McCormick breathed. "They've got—got spies here—knew I told you—Blattner . . ."

"Gently, son," the parson said. "You try to rest until the doctor gets here."

McCormick's voice rattled in his throat. He shook his head with effort, then said, "No use—got me in the back."

As suddenly as the bullet had struck him, life drained away. The eyes closed reluctant-

ly, the breath wheezed out, the big frame went limp. Jeff laid the shoulders down gently.

The minister prayed silently, earnestly. Men removed their hats and bowed their heads. A door slammed nearby. The doctor, nightshirt flapping under his coat, halted and peered into the street. His shoulders sagged as he turned away.

When the parson stood at last, Hoad beckoned. Three men came and carried McCormick's body away. Jeff turned, staring off to where Monte Mainnard had ridden into the night. Now there was one more score to be settled with the Gunsight crowd.

The talk in the saloon after that was all jumbled. Somebody wanted to deputize a posse and go to Gunsight after Mainnard. Somebody else wondered about McCormick being in town. Nobody seemed to know why. Jeff wondered if it had been because McCormick was decent and wanted to help Pawnee. And Jeff wondered who had blabbed McCormick's information until it reached Blattner's spies. Each man of the original group swore that he had not repeated the facts. But, Jeff noticed, Thomason was nowhere in sight. Men glanced guiltily to their neighbors and slipped off into the night.

There was nothing to help Jeff when he got back to his lean-to. He could blame Thomason, but he had no proof. He had two undeniable facts. McCormick had told him of Blattner's connection with Ark Valley. And Jeff had passed that knowledge on to the men of the group. Directly or indirectly, he was responsible for McCormick's death.

He was responsible for a lot—for McCormick, for the farce at Gunsight, for too many things. And too many things paraded before his mind's eye when he tried to sleep. He tossed and turned on the hard bunk for hours before sleep came. Then he was awakened abruptly by banging and shouts.

He sat up, bleary-eyed and aching, as still another column of men marched in upon him. They were Main Street merchants. The set of their faces indicated they had made up their minds about something which they didn't expect Jeff to like. He knew he had guessed right when he saw Thomason at the back.

"All right," Jeff said, pulling on pants and boots, "what's it all about?"

He leaned back to build a smoke and they gathered in front of him—Nicholson, built like his own cracker barrel, Andrews, the hotel owner, Bennett, the cheap lawyer, Ormes, the cafe owner and Thomason and his man, Findley, from the bank. At first they all babbled, then nobody spoke.

During the moment of awkward silence, Jeff fixed Thomason with a cold stare and said, "Who did you tell about McCormick yesterday?"

The sudden question widened the banker's eyes with guilt. He stammered for a moment, then said, "I don't know what you mean."

"You're a liar," Jeff said. He glanced from man to man, coming finally to Nicholson, nearest him. He said, "I want to know why you're here. Get it said."

Nicholson, too, flinched under the cold stare and the unexpected question. "Because Sheriff Hoad threw us out of his office," the fat merchant blurted.

"You damn fool," Bennett said.

"Well, he had no right to," Nicholson said. "We figure the way to beat Gunsight is at its own game." He paused for breath, his round face flushed. "We aim to make Pawnee just as wide open as Gunsight."

"You don't expect me to agree with you," Jeff said. "Why'd you come here?"

"If you're smart, you'll agree," Thomason said. "There's no sense in all of us going broke if we can bring the business here. Think of the money you could make if we had half the people here from Gunsight."

"I can't think of money," Jeff said. "I keep thinking of a lousy little banker with a bag of gold where his heart should be."

"We came to talk," Nicholson cut in, "not to fight. We checked up. If we pass local laws allowing gambling and dancehalls in Pawnee, the county can't touch us."

"You're right on that," Jeff said. "But what's the matter with you jaspers? Every last one of you has got a family. Do you want to bring your kids up in a hellhole like Gunsight?"

"That's not the question," Nicholson said. "We came here to ask if you'd throw in with us. All we want is a straight answer."

"I won't answer a question like that," Jeff said. "All I've got to say to you is get out.

And I mean get the hell out, and I mean right now."

Nicholson frowned. "Is that your final word?"

"Wait. Please wait."

A WOMAN'S voice knifed through the group, blunting hot tempers, softening strong words. As one man, they faced the door. Tina moved inside, glancing from face to face.

"There's nothing you can do to change our minds, Tina," Nicholson said hastily.

The other men echoed his opinion, and they all addressed her by her first name. For the hundredth time in the last two days Jeff wondered just how much he had missed during his many drunks. Everybody had known about Gunsight and the railroad and the governor's commands and Tina, except Jeff.

"I couldn't help hearing everything," she said, moving beside Jeff. "You're all worried and scared. Why don't you stop and think what you're saying?"

"We have thought about it," Nicholson said. "We don't like to think about losing our homes and our business. If the mayor doesn't want to throw in with us, we can pass our laws after we get him out of office."

"The elections aren't over yet," Tina said. "Maybe Jeff'll get more support than you're counting on."

"You're not scaring us," Nicholson said, moving to the door, beckoning the men to follow. "You go back and tell your pa that it's going to take more weight than Sam Hollister can swing to win for anybody."

The door slammed, and the men were gone. Jeff stared at Tina, not sure that he had heard straight, not sure of anything.

"That's really what I came to tell you," Tina said.

"What?"

"That I'm Sam Hollister's daughter."

And now the barrier between them was as solid as a brick wall.

"All right, you've told me," he said. "Now go back and tell your father that whatever game he's trying, he'd better play his cards himself, instead of sending his daughter."

"Jeff, please listen to me." She came to him, urgently pleading. "I knew there'd been an accident when the boys were bringing in the new stock, but—"

"An accident?" Jeff exploded. "What's the matter? Is Sam all of a sudden scared of me?"

"Jeff, please." She took his hands. "He wants to help you. And so do I."

"More charity?" he stormed, shaking her off. "A year ago I promised myself I'd kill Sam Hollister if I ever saw him."

"Jeff!"

"If he sent you here to plead for him, he's wasting your time and mine too. Now if you've said all you came to say, you can leave me alone."

Tears welled into her eyes, drowning the sparkle. Somehow Jeff found satisfaction in hurting her. He leaped at the opportunity to twist the knife in the wound.

"Go back," he said, "and tell your father that I still plan to kill him the first chance I get."

"Oh, please," Tina begged. "He doesn't even know I came here. He wouldn't send anybody to plead for him. He wouldn't plead himself. I came because I really didn't know who you were until last night. I came because I wanted to get things straight between us."

"And now they're straight," Jeff said. "Now get out."

"Please, Jeff."

He crossed to the door, jerked it open and turned away.

"Won't you say anything to me?"

"Good-by."

He heard her choke a sob, then he heard nothing more. He waited. When finally he turned, she was gone. He sprang to the door and banged it shut.

Slumping to his bunk, he reached for the jug. He put it to his lips, shook it, cursed its emptiness and flung it from him. Morosely, he watched it shatter against the opposite wall.

He was beaten, finished, thoroughly shaken in every respect. The proof of his having failed the folks of Pawnee was in their thinking in terms of an open town. Yet there was nothing he could do about it. He was a laughingstock in Gunsight, an incompetent in Pawnee. He had talked big and had fallen hard.

What was even worse, he had fallen hard for Tina Hollister, the daughter of his wife's murderer. Still haunted by the memory of

Betty, he was in love with Tina. And he had vowed to kill her father.

His back was against the wall. He was trapped, hemmed in from every side. And there was no way to climb the wall or to go around it. He was whipped.

He poked around the lean-to, hoping to find a bottle or a jug not quite empty. He was staring at the shattered remains of the last just when he heard the carriage wheel into the stable. It was just in time. If he could gouge a dollar out of somebody, he could stay drunk a long time.

MOVING through the door, he stopped short, staring. He'd never seen as fancy a carriage as the one which stood before him. All black and shiny and massive, with ornate carving in the wooden panels and black leather upholstery. There was a big Negro in black livery up on the seat, behind two sleek, black geldings.

"What do you need?" Jeff asked.

"Nothin' but time," the Negro said, tossing a silver dollar to Jeff. "Governor Blattner and his party is up at the hotel feedin' their faces. Governor say, 'Don't stay in the sun and get the seats hot and stay out of the dust.' He say they got to walk down Main Street to make it look like they's seein' the town and they'll come here."

"Well, climb down and stretch," Jeff said. "You come all the way from the capital in this?"

The big Negro climbed down stiffly, stretching. "No, sir, we didn't," he said. "Come on the train to the end of the line. Had this rig and the team in the baggage car. Governor, he believes in travelin' good."

"Why'd he bother?" Jeff asked. "He should've just gone to Gunsight where he's got so much land."

"Yep, that's the way I figure. But ol' Governor, he's—"

The Negro broke off and stared at Jeff. He grinned, then, and moved around his horses, checking harness. He said, "You talk like a smart boy. Maybe you shouldn't oughta be guessin' out loud like that."

"Maybe," Jeff said, returning the grin.

Sure it had been a guess, but, if nothing else, it had proved other guesses. The governor did own land at Gunsight, but he was wise enough to put in an appearance in Pawnee before openly throwing his weight in the other direction.

The Negro, friendly but suspicious, refused to talk after that. Shoving two bales of hay together, he stretched out and slept. Jeff could do little but wait. But when he saw the Negro sleeping, he slipped into a stall near the carriage, scattered straw over himself and pretended to sleep. It was a full hour before he heard voices in the street.

The governor, Jeff observed, hadn't got out of town easily. Familiar voices harangued outside, demanding explanations, whining, making feeble threats.

Then the governor's most eloquent tones boomed out.

"Friends, I can appreciate how upset you must be about the coming election to determine the permanent county seat of Buffalo County. But you must realize your government's position. When Pawnee was designated as county seat there was, to all practical purpurposes, no town of Gunsight. Now we must acknowledge the existence of the town and its people by granting them a chance to vote.

"I am impressed with Pawnee. It's a good town, a clean and respectable town. Certainly the citizens of the county must feel the same way. I don't see that you have any cause for worry. If I lived in Buffalo County, I'd vote for this fine metropolis of the prairie, Pawnee."

To Jeff the speech sounded like so much sheep-dip. But the folks outside, apparently charmed by the politician's manner, gave him a brief round of applause. There was vague talk outside as the crowd broke up. Presently the governor's and other voices moved closer to Jeff.

"Joe," the governor called, "is everything ready? Let's go."

"Yes, sir," the Negro said. "Everything shipshape, sir."

"What do you think?" another voice asked.

"Pawnee looks good," the governor said. "Too damn good. Like I said, it's clean and respectable and quiet and prosperous. We're going to have to buy a lot of votes for Gunsight."

There was the sound of men climbing into

the carriage. Jeff counted four, maybe five.

"Come on, Joe," Blattner said. "We've got lots to do in Gunsight."

"Yes, sir," Joe said.

A whip cracked and the carriage moved out of the stable. There were more cheers along the street as Jeff came out of the stall. For a moment he stared after the carriage, knowing what had to be done, but not knowing how to do it. Then he remembered the parson's words. And he knew. He had failed at fighting fire with fire. Or maybe he had used the wrong kind of fire. At any rate, he had an idea.

Hurrying, he crossed to the lean-to, grabbed up his guns and plenty of ammunition. Then he raced to the stallion's stall and saddled the big black. Scant minutes behind the governor's carriage, Jeff sent the stallion galloping out the back door of the stable.

He circled wide to the south, pushing the stallion, keeping to gullies and timber. When he hit the stage road the governor's big carriage was a mile behind him. He settled the black into an easy lope and pulled steadily ahead.

His idea had been only vague. Now he turned it over and over in his mind, re-examining it. It seemed too simple, somehow, too obvious. Fighting fire with fire was one thing. But to heap new fuel on that fire in order to put it out seemed more than a little loco.

STILL it might work. And at this point any gamble was well worth the risk. Risk there would be, too, with the likes of Monte Mainnard ruling Gunsight unofficially.

Topping a rise, Jeff glanced back. The carriage came on steadily, but it was falling farther behind. And then Jeff pulled down hard, bringing the stallion to a sliding halt.

How he could have forgotten, he didn't know, but after his trip to Gunsight yesterday he couldn't possibly slip into town unrecognized.

Jumping down, he grinned, shook his head, then plunged headlong into the loose dirt of the road. He scooped up handfuls of dirt and rubbed it into his face. Snatching off his hat, he tossed it down, stomped on it. He ripped the badge from his shirt, taking a piece of cloth with it. He tore out an elbow of the shirt, then kneaded grime into shirt, pants and vest.

Satisfied at last with his appearance, he mounted up and rode to Gunsight, aware that he had missed breakfast, that it was already well past dinner time. Again he found traffic and population increased since his last visit. And he was willing to bet there wasn't a man in town who'd object to voting a dozen times.

Dismounting, he strode into a saloon, slapped the governor's silver dollar on the bar and shouted, "Gimme a bottle of the cheapest whisky you got."

The bartender brought a bottle, took Jeff's dollar and put back a half. Jeff pocketed the money with a laugh. Shoving the bottle inside his shirt, he moved back to his horse, mounted and rode to the north edge of town.

Dismounting beside a scrubby tree, Jeff tied the stallion, then took out his bottle and sat beneath the tree. He glanced up the road. The carriage wouldn't be along for a while yet, he knew. And he wondered at his own willpower with that bottle in his hand.

He flipped out the cork, sniffed the whisky. Frowning, he held the bottle out, upended it and dumped most of the red-eye. He leaned back against the tree, then, and held the bottle affectionately in his lap.

It was nearly an hour before the high-stepping geldings and the carriage came over the rise a mile north of town. Jeff checked his sixgun once more, laid the Winchester beside him. A pulse hammered in his throat as he watched the carriage approach. Once he glanced back toward town. Monte Mainnard and the other boys just might be expecting their visitors.

The carriage came on, grandly, importantly. And then it was close enough. Jeff sagged back against the tree, waved the bottle in one hand and his sixgun in the other. He let out one warwhoop. Then he cut loose with the sixgun at the carriage.

The geldings, accustomed to gentler living, reared and screamed. Joe tumbled over backwards into the laps of the distinguished passengers. The governor and his friends dived for the floor.

Jeff dropped the sixgun, yelled happily and grabbed the rifle. Taking careful aim without seeming to try, he sniped away at the tassels,

the folded top, the exposed upholstery. A hand with a small nickel-plated revolver poked up over the side, followed by a magnificent black hat and a head. Jeff needed one shot to send the hat sailing. The head dropped out of sight.

Frantic curses exploded from within the carriage. Joe sprang back to his seat. Jeff put a bullet close enough to scare the Negro. Joe dived between the spooked horses, grabbed the reins and, climbing back to the seat, yelled and flapped the reins. The geldings reared again, then lunged into the traces. The carriage bolted toward town.

Jeff snatched up the bottle again. Lurching to his feet, he waved rifle and bottle at the departing dignitaries. Governor Blattner, peering cautiously back, didn't return the wave.

As the coach swung out of sight, Jeff threw down the bottle and raced to his horse. He wheeled the horse west, roweled hard. It stood to reason that the governor would send his paid gunmen after such a disturber of the peace. Jeff just didn't hanker to meet any of those gents—not at that time, anyhow.

Well west of town, he circled back and entered Railroad Avenue leisurely. He saw the carriage up in front of the big, new Railroad Hotel. Loafers peered up the street toward the north, no doubt watching for Mainnard and his cohorts.

Jeff reined up at the nearest cafe and went in. He'd played his first hand. Now he'd sit back and try to go unnoticed until he was ready to deal himself in again. But he was betting that Blattner and his friends already had some misgivings about throwing their weight in favor of such a wild town. Whether Jeff could convince them of their error remained to be seen.

He ate a big meal and still had a quarter of his dollar left. Back at the tie-rail, he took cartridges from saddlebags to fill his pockets and to load his sixgun and rifle. He mounted casually, rode slowly up to the corner of Railroad Avenue and Trail Street. Glancing up, he saw Governor Blattner move past a front window on the second floor of the hotel, overlooking a balcony of green and gold gingerbread. Jeff turned north on Trail Street, dismounted and tied the stallion. If he had to leave town in a hurry, the horse was pointed in the right direction.

CRADLING the rifle, he ambled back along Trail Street and across the avenue. He found a bench against a store front directly opposite the hotel. He sat, watching people pass, only occasionaly glancing to the hotel window.

He had heard flurries of gunfire and the crashing sounds of brawls many times. Now he waited for more excitement. He didn't have to wait long.

Just down and across the street a saloon erupted with sudden violence. Glass crashed. Girls screamed. Guns roared. A man tumbled through the bat-wings. Along the street people turned to watch.

Jeff put the rifle to his shoulder and fired. One of the governor's windows shattered. Jeff stood. Reeling drunkenly, he staggered back to the narrow space between buildings. There he paused and threw lead through the other two front windows of the governor's rooms.

He lowered the rifle and waited, ready to run. Blattner, his hand wrapped in a blanket, knocked glass splinters aside and poked his head out the window to look. Monte Mainnard appeared in the doorway downstairs. Both men peered up and down the street. Both men cursed loudly when they saw no sign of the sniper. Blattner pulled back, threw down the blanket and spoke to the men inside the room. Mainnard shrugged and headed for the hotel bar.

Jeff moved back to the boardwalk. Stepping down into the darkening street, he moved into traffic. A wagon rattled close by. He stepped back and glanced up. Tina Hollister guided a team of horses through the milling throng. She went on up the street a block and turned off toward the school.

It might be important for her to haul things to school, Jeff thought, but she had no business being on the street alone. But Tina Hollister was not his affair.

There were enough saddle-tramps and busted gamblers in the hotel lobby that Jeff had no trouble losing himself among them. He saw Blattner and his party come downstairs and go into the dining room. He saw Mainnard and another gunslick follow along and

occupy a nearby table. He sauntered about for a moment, then moseyed upstairs.

In the long hallway he had one bad moment, wondering about Joe, the Negro. But he was certain the driver would have been left to a cheap tent hotel or to the livery stable loft. Still he couldn't take a chance. He knocked at the governor's door.

He waited, knocked again. When nobody came he tried the door. It was locked. He put his shoulder to the door. It was solid. Backing three paces he waited. Again he hadn't long to wait.

Once more violence exploded in some nearby saloon or dancehall. Jeff glanced down the empty hall, then rushed at the door. Pain stabbed his shoulder. But the door gave a little. He backed up, rushed again and this time the door crashed open.

Moving inside, closing the door behind him, he crossed to a window and climbed through. He hunkered down on the balcony to watch the passing people below. At last he spied a drunken puncher reeling along the street. He brought up the rifle, snapped a bullet between the man's boots and ducked out of sight.

When he peeked over the railing again, Jeff saw the puncher sitting on the boardwalk across the street, pointing, waving, talking volubly to a companion. Jeff brought up the rifle again. This shot lifted the friend's hat.

Again Jeff ducked down and waited. Again he peered over. Now the first two drunks had gathered a half dozen friends. They argued and pointed to the balcony and argued some more. Jeff triggered another bullet over their heads and dropped out of sight. This time guns roared below. Bullets whined through the gingerbread.

Jeff grinned and glanced around him. The grin froze on his face. Panic welled up. He had forgotten to find an escape route before he started shooting. At any minute the governor's party might return. He'd be trapped.

Clutching the rifle to him, keeping low, he crawled to one end of the balcony. From there he stared straight down into Trail Street. He glanced up. No chances there. He couldn't climb that false front if he wanted to. Raising to a crouch, he crow-hopped to the other end of the balcony. He breathed easier. Here was a chance—risky, but possible.

He moved back to the railing then and poked his head up. Two guns flashed in the street. A bullet tugged at his hat. He dropped down and waited. More gunfire exploded in the street below. Bullets stabbed through the railing, probing dangerously near. Jeff flattened himself.

Suddenly he heard voices nearby. He raised his head. He heard the governor's door open, heard exclamations at the broken lock, heard somebody mention the balcony.

Jeff pulled his .45 and raised up. A dozen men yelled when they saw him. He pointed the sixgun well above the men and fanned it empty. Wheeling, holstering the gun, he raced to the far end of the roof. Guns roared below. Bullets whined across the balcony.

CLIMBING to the railing, Jeff leaped out and down. The roof of the next-door building rushed at him, slammed at him, knocked the wind out of him. But he held on to his guns. Gasping for air, he lurched up and sprinted along the roof toward the alley. Behind him men shouted and guns blazed away.

At the rear of the building he found a drain spout and slid down it. He darted past the rear of the hotel, halted, peeked around the corner to Railroad Avenue. Too many people were gathereing there. He might be seen. Turning, he ran the length of the block the other way and into the street.

"Jeff!"

A patch of light had caught him. Instinctively, he dived into the shadows. Then he saw the wagon coming up the street from the school. In it were Tina—and Sam Hollister. "Jeff Martin, is that you?" Sam Hollister called.

"You damn right it's me," Jeff said, cradling the rifle, moving away from the shadows. He cuffed sweat from his brow and realized that most of the dirt had washed away and that he had lost his hat somewhere back there.

"Come on over here," Hollister said. "I'd like to talk to you."

"I'll do my talking with a gun," Jeff said, "but right now I haven't got time." He turned toward Railroad Avenue.

"Please, Jeff," Tina called.

He turned to face them. All the bitter mem-

ories crowded into his mind and he saw the big rancher as a devil incarnate. He said, "I'm going to kill you, Sam Hollister. But I won't do it while your daughter's watching—not unless you force me."

"Jeff," Hollister said, "do you know there was light behind you all the way up the alley? Tina recognized you. I could've dropped you any time."

"You'll wish you had," Jeff said.

Spinning, he darted to the avenue, the sound of warfare rocking the town. Behind him he heard his name called. He didn't look back. He turned onto Railroad Avenue and raced down to join the drunks.

They had taken some cover now as answering shots came from the hotel windows. Jeff dashed into a doorway, levered the rifle and began snapping bullets into the windows.

"Give it to 'em!" he shouted. "Those rich and crooked tinhorns got no business shootin' at us poor punchers."

Beside Jeff a man whooped drunkenly and emptied his sixgun into the hotel. More men hooted. More guns roared. Jeff brought up his own .45, loaded it full, fanned it empty.

He whooped, he yelled, he screamed, he threw hot lead as fast as he could load and pull the trigger. He was putting all his cards on the table now, heaping fuel upon the fire. He had to help Gunsight blow so wide open it'd scare off the governor's fellow conspirators.

He hoped nobody would get hurt much. The punchers were too drunk to hit what they shot at. And the light was bad for the men in the hotel. But lots of people would be hurt if Gunsight won the county seat election.

Jeff pulled back into the doorway and put the rifle to his shoulder. Aiming carefully, he knocked out windows in the building next door to the hotel, then in the building next to that, then in a saloon beyond. More men piled into the street, firing wildly at anything. More guns flashed from more windows.

Lowering his rifle, then, Jeff cupped hands to his mouth and yelled across the street. "We know who you are, Governor Blattner. And we know why you're here. We don't want you. Get on out while you still can."

The drunken punchers, still shooting because they'd been shot at, picked up Jeff's yell and flung it again and again at the hotel. The shouts rang up and down the street.

"Get out, Blattner!"

"Go home, Governor!"

"We don't want you!"

Smiling, Jeff drifted up the street. His cards were on the table, playing themselves. Right now he didn't want anybody who might recognize him catching him in the midst of the rioters. The governor's crew might yet be able to explain things. Still looking back to the gunfire, Jeff was almost to the end of the block when a gun jabbed his ribs.

"Just stand still, Martin," Sam Hollister's voice said from the shadows, "and don't try for a gun."

"Why not try for a gun? I still might get you."

"Don't," Hollister said. "I don't want to kill you."

"Maybe I wouldn't care if you did," Jeff said. "I think your town's losing its chance for county seat. And maybe I'd be happier where Betty is."

"Martin, will you listen to me for a minute?"

THE pressure of the gun relaxed and Hollister stepped from the shadows to face Jeff. A light from across the street flickered in the rancher's heavy face and Jeff, in spite of himself, read sincerity there.

"Twice tonight I could've killed you," Hollister said. "It would've been easy and no questions asked. I don't want to kill you. I haven't got a thing against you, and you shouldn't have a thing against me."

"Just a life," Jeff said. "But maybe that's not important to you."

"It is," Hollister said. "When I found out about your wife, I took out the boys responsible, and I beat them till they couldn't walk. I took some punishment, too. Maybe that's what I wanted. I felt guilty. The boys felt guilty. But I swear to you, Jeff Martin, it was an accident. The boys were getting close to home. They got careless. Then your wife spooked the cattle and ran in front of them and—"

Was that the way it happened? There had been a picture like that in Jeff's mind, but he had refused to look at it, had pushed it back

into the dark corners, had drowned it in cheap corn whisky. Was that the way it had happened? Had Betty been at fault along with Hollister's men? Had Jeff blamed Hollister all this time because of his own feeling of guilt that he hadn't stopped her?

Suddenly he felt weak. He leaned against a store front and tried to drag his mind back to what Hollister was saying.

"So I guess I can't say anything else—except that I'm sorry."

Jeff peered at him—at Sam Hollister, at the man he'd hated so violently for a year. And he couldn't help it—he smiled at the big rancher, and then he put out his hand.

Hollister grinned back and took the hand. He said, "Well, now, maybe—"

But he didn't finish. He broke off at the same instant the impression hit Jeff. It was too quiet. He realized suddenly that the wild shooting had stopped. Turning, he saw a familiar figure, backed by others, standing on the hotel balcony. The scared whisper ran the length of Railroad Avenue.

"It's Monte Mainnard!"

"Yeah, that's right," the gunslinger shouted. "It's Monte Mainnard. And I got plenty of help here with me. Now I wanta know what the hell you think you're doin' shootin' at Governor Blattner. And I wanta know what jasper started it."

"There's the strong man," Jeff hissed to Hollister. "He can scare a street full of drunk punchers just by looking at them. I've gotta get him or Pawnee's done."

"You can't match him," Hollister said.

Jeff dug into his pockets, slid more cartridges into the Winchester. "I'm not going with a sixgun."

RANCH FLICKER TALK

*A Roundup of Movie News Presented By*

**BOB CUMMINGS**

***Coming Up Next Issue!***

●

**A Review of Universal's**

**PILLARS OF THE SKY**

***starring***

**JEFF CHANDLER and DOROTHY MALONE**

●

**PLUS A WORD-AND-PICTURE PERSONALITY SKETCH OF**

**JOHN SMITH**

"Then I'm going along," Hollister said.

"Stay out of it."

"No." Hollister put a big hand on Jeff's shoulder, turning him. He said, "Look, young'un, I don't want Gunsight as a county seat any more'n you do. My holdings go fair close to it and I don't want it wide open. I've got family men workin' for me and their kids need a decent place to go to school. I've got things at stake here, too. Besides, I'm no greenhorn when it comes to a Colt."

"Let's go," Jeff said.

The street was silent now except for Main-

nard's yell. He flung his words down at the awed men below him.

"I'm not funnin' you boys one bit," he said. "I want to know who started this shootin'. In about a minute I'm gonna take my gun out and I'm gonna start throwin' lead and somebody's gonna get hurt. Now talk, damn your hides!"

But nobody could talk. None of the drunks had seen Jeff, at least not to name him as the instigator. And most of them had started shooting just because everybody else was shooting.

"Damn the whole stinkin' lot of you," Mainnard yelled. "I want to know who started it."

Jeff and Hollister angled into the middle of the street now, halfway down the block. Mainnard glanced to the movement, then glanced again. But he still yelled to the crowd below him.

"For the last time," he shouted, "who started it?"

"I did," Jeff said to the tomb silence. "And I say you and Blattner and the whole crowd are a gang of thievin', murderin', sidewinders."

A shout went up from the crowd in the street, from the men on the hotel balcony, but Jeff barely heard it, as he saw Mainnard's first motion.

"Look out!" Jeff yelled to Hollister.

HE SAW the big rancher lurch aside as Mainnard's gun came up. Jeff dropped to one knee, whipped the rifle to his shoulder. Mainnard's gun flared, the blast coming at the same instant Jeff felt the pain searing across his shoulders. Mainnard's gun flashed again. Jeff sighted along the barrel and heard Hollister grunt in surprise and pain. Then Jeff squeezed the trigger.

The Winchester kicked solidly against him. He heard the repeated bark of Hollister's .45. More guns flashed back at them from the balcony. But Mainnard doubled over, his gun spinning out of his hand. He grabbed the railing, held on for a moment, glaring his hate, his pain at Jeff.

"That's for McCormick!" Jeff shouted.

Mainnard's head wagged, slumped. He folded over, pitching across the railing, plunging down to the street.

Hollister lunged around Jeff, snatched the .45 from Jeff's holster, ducked to a half-crouch and pumped bullets at the balcony. Jeff levered the rifle and opened fire. Up on the balcony another man sprawled backwards, hit the railing at the end and tumbled into Trail Street. Another dropped his gun and, wobbling, eased himself down. Still another threw down his weapon and put up his hands. The last one lunged for the window. He was halfway through when a bullet hit him.

And then it was finished. Sam Hollister, with blood oozing down his shirt from a rib scrape, grinned at Jeff and thumped his shoulder. Jeff winced. Hollister tore back Jeff's bloody, ripped shirt and snorted.

"Hardly scratched you," he said. "And, say, thanks for the use of your gun. Didn't figure I oughta take time to reload."

"They mighta got our range," Jeff said. "Their light was bad, and we had 'em silhouetted. Monte Mainnard should've known better'n to get himself in a spot like that."

"Stop them!" It was the governor, yelling from the balcony. "Stop those murderers!"

Jeff and Hollister turned. But not a man in the crowd had moved.

"If you don't cut out that yellin'," Sam Hollister shouted, "you're liable to get what your hired killers got."

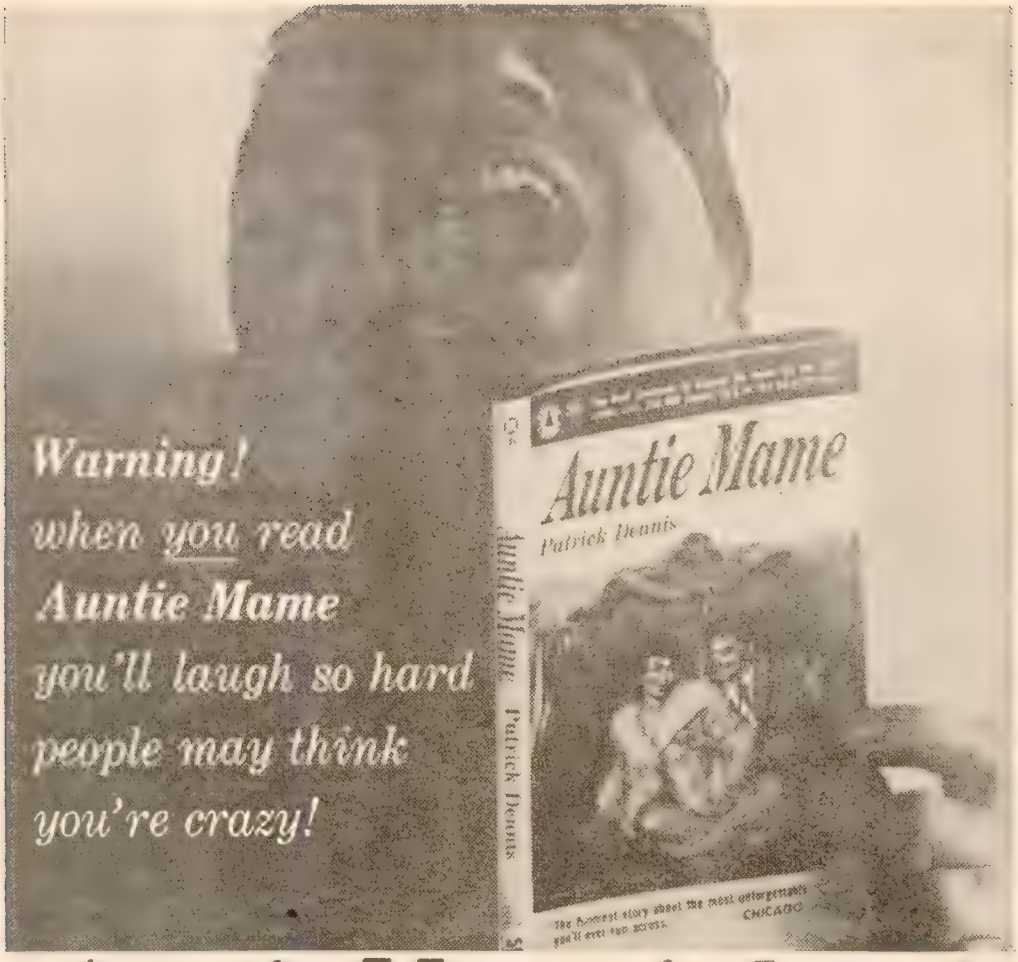
"Somebody get them!" Blattner cried. "Shoot them down!"

"You're all done," Jeff said, "you and George Washington and all the rest of your crowd. You're a cheap, chiseling grafter and this whole town knows it. You stole land and you tried to bleed the railroad for the same land and you've finished yourself as governor and everything else. You'd better clear out."

The crowd took up that yell. Blattner dived through a window into his room. Sam Hollister laughed and put an arm on Jeff's shoulder.

"How about me and my boys helping you build up your place again?" Hollister said. "You've got some good land."

Jeff heard him, but just barely. Up at the next corner Tina jumped down from the wagon. She ran toward them laughing and crying. Suddenly Jeff couldn't remember any farther back than the first day he met her.




# Auntie Mame is here!

## This new POPULAR LIBRARY bestseller is the funniest, zaniest laugh riot of them all!

Over eighty weeks on the bestseller lists! A quarter million copies bought at $3.50! *Auntie Mame*, the Broadway play starring Rosalind Russell, is already a smash hit! Now, POPULAR LIBRARY is proud to announce its 50c pocket-size edition!

30P

***Buy Auntie Mame at your favorite newsstand today!***

Remember, we've warned you! If people look at you queerly, don't try to explain—just tell them to buy their own copy.

*Jesse Clayton knew he must make his friend see the wrong*

*he was doing . . . even if it made of him a shooting enemy*

# DAY OF

THE sun was hot by nine o'clock that morning. As I rode up to the cattle pens I saw Severidge, the cattle buyer from Winnipeg. He took off his hat and mopped his face as he moved down the lanes between the pens to look the animals over.

Greenway, Shouldice and Moffat, three of the small ranchers who had cattle for sale, were with Severidge. Their faces were tight and uneasy, but Severidge looked normal, his face calm and expressionless, and I knew the three men with him hadn't told him what was happening. Rightly so, too. There was no point in dragging Severidge into an affair that didn't concern him.

I looked for Uncle Jesse. He was standing on the east side of the pens, one hand resting on a slat of the stockade fence. He was bareheaded and his sleeves were rolled up. It wasn't because he was waiting for Lafe King to come sweeping into town to settle up, he'd arrived in Fort MacLeod at dawn like that. He'd worked hard the night before. He'd had to, to scatter Lafe King's saddle-horses deep in the foothills single-handed, leaving Lafe afoot twenty miles from his nearest neighbor and shouting his useless rage into the roar of the wind-tossed cottonwoods.

Uncle Jesse was stocky and thickset at thirty-four. His straight brown hair fell over the forehead of his strong square face as though it had never grown up. His eyes, smoke-gray and usually cheerful, weren't cheerful now. They were withdrawn and sombre, grieving for the good days before Lafe King and his Lazy LK got too big for the foothills country.

When I dismounted beside him, I stepped softly, I'd have done anything for him, and this was one of the things. To be quiet, to understand. And maybe to fear a little for him.

I said, "Hello, Uncle Jesse," and watched his head turn slowly toward me and his eyes come away from the past. I swallowed the lump in my throat and said, "I met Lafe's riders taking the herd back to the ranch on my way in. They told me about last night."

Uncle Jesse corrected me quietly. "They didn't have all of the herd, Johnny. Fifty of them are here in the pens, ready to be sold along with the others."

There wasn't anything left to say then. That took care of it. This time Lafe King was going to sell his cattle Uncle Jesse's way whether he liked it or not. There wasn't anything to do, either—just watch Severidge getting hotter in the sun, scan the watchful worried faces of Greenway, Shouldice and Moffat and the handful of other small ranchers in a knot at the corner of the pens, and wait for Lafe King's dustcloud to appear among the hills and boil its way into town.

Severidge was a good business man. In fifteen minutes the steers in the pens belonged to his firm in Winnipeg at the flat price of twenty-one dollars a head regardless of the brand on their hips. That concluded his busi-

By M. E. BRADSHAW

# RECKONING

ness in Fort MacLeod for this trip, and he took his leave of the ranchers, mounted his horse and started away. When he turned the corner of the pens onto the street he saw Uncle Jesse.

He had no way of knowing about last night, so it was natural for him to rein up and ask, "Where's King?"

Uncle Jesse met his eye mildly, but there was an edge in his voice. "If you want his exact geographical location, I'd say about seven miles out of town and coming fast."

It was the first inkling Severidge had that there was trouble brewing, but like I said, he was a good business man. He minded his own and let others do the same.

He considered Uncle Jesse shrewdly a minute, then said, "Well—" He shrugged and let his hands fall. "I came to buy eighty prime steers and I got them. That's all I want, but I missed King. He's usualy here. I was just asking, that's all."

He gathered up the reins and rode off. The train to Calgary was leaving in half an hour and he'd be on it, long before Lafe could get to town. Not that it mattered whether Severidge was here or not. Lafe couldn't change what had been done. Only Severidge wouldn't be there to see him settle up with the man who'd done it.

As I watched Severidge's dust lift and spread in the heat, I couldn't help thinking of the dust and heat of another day. It was nine years ago that Uncle Jesse and I got off the stagecoach in Calgary. Uncle Jesse liked the looks of the country south, so we started walking. We walked for two days and then a man in a wagon came along and gave us a ride. When we got to Fort MacLeod Uncle Jesse liked the looks of the country west. So we started walking again.

By late afternoon we were well into the yawning green gullies of the foothills. Our feet were sore, so we climbed down the side of a draw to a clear shallow creek and took off our boots and dangled our feet in the water.

LAFE KING found us there. He was tall in the saddle and untidy red hair showed under his battered Stetson. His face was sun-tanned and friendly and he spoke to Uncle Jesse with a drawl I'd never heard before.

"How do, stranger. You and the boy look like you've been on the trail awhile."

Uncle Jesse took his feet out of the water and squared around so he could look at the man on horseback. Then he said, "We have. All the way from Winnipeg," and he stood up and climbed back to the top of the draw.

I watched him swishing barefoot through the grass. He was my favorite uncle, maybe because he was only twenty-four and he could still remember what it was like to be eleven. My other aunts and uncles wanted to adopt me when my parents drowned crossing the Red at flood-tide, but Uncle Jesse beat them to it. He knew he shouldn't have appointed himself my legal guardian without benefit of a court, but he also knew the others only wanted me to work on their farms in place of a hired boy and he wouldn't stand for that. So early one morning he came for me at Mrs. McMurray's house and we sneaked onto the first train west out of Winnipeg, changed to a stagecoach at the end-of-track and here we were.

He held out his hand to the man in the saddle. "I'm Jesse Clayton, and the boy is my nephew, Johnny Youngblood."

Lafe King introduced himself and they shook hands. Lafe's blue eyes had sized Uncle Jesse up and I could tell they liked what they found. I wasn't surprised, because Uncle Jesse had a steadfastness you didn't find in everybody. He got it from counting the Lord as a personal friend Whose advice he never turned down. Calm inside, quiet outside, that was Uncle Jesse.

When I got to the top of the draw Lafe was telling Uncle Jesse, "I've only been here two years, myself. I'm a Texan. Drove in a herd of longhorns for a man up to Chimney Rock, and liked the country so well I decided to stay."

"I like it too," Uncle Jesse said. "Who owns this land hereabouts?"

Lafe said cheerfully, "I do. Bought back five of the steers I'd brought in and started my own spread. Now I've got thirty-five head and it takes two days to ride across my grazing rights. A man can get ahead in this country. It's rich. Not in money, maybe, but in grass and water and rainfall. What it takes to start a herd and keep it going, build it up."

He stooped and there was embarrassment in his grin. "I've talked more in the last five minutes than I have all year. Most times there's no one to talk to but steers."

This time he waited for Uncle Jesse to speak, and I knew why. It was the way they did things out west. If a man wanted to tell you his business, you listened. If he didn't, you didn't ask.

Uncle Jesse grinned. "I'm a preacher. I'm looking around for a place to build a church—"

"A preacher! No!" Lafe batted his hat over his eyes with a sweep of an arm, then sobered and spoke seriously. "Fort MacLeod's your best bet. Country west of MacLeod isn't

settled yet. There's nobody here but me and a couple of families that drifted in last year, the Greenways and Moffats."

Uncle Jesse looked thoughtful. "Are they church-going people?"

"Never asked them."

"Well—" I could tell Uncle Jesse was thinking hard. "I want to start a church for people who don't get to church because the round trip on Sunday is too far. And you say two families came in last year. There'll be more coming in this year, won't there?"

"I reckon so."

Uncle Jesse smiled quietly. "Then I don't think it'll be Fort MacLeod. It seems to me all I saw there was church steeples anyhow."

"You mean," Lafe said, "you're aiming to set up shop back here in the foothills for half a dozen strays like us?"

"Can you give me a good reason why I shouldn't?"

"By darn," Lafe said softly. "Well, I was brought up a hardshell Baptist, myself. I guess it wouldn't take much pushing to get me to hold down your back-row bench of a Sunday morning." He looked at me quickly then. "You're tuckered out, youngster. Where are you and your uncle putting up tonight?"

Uncle Jesse answered for me lamely. "Oh, we just camp out wherever we wind up. Here, if you don't mind."

"I do mind," Lafe said, "but only because I've got a house a mile or so back in the hills. Its honing for company and so am I."

So we went to Lafe King's house for the night. We stayed a year. It was a wonderful year. I could remember it like it was yesterday, and then suddenly I wasn't remembering at all.

Pete Moffat was coming around the corner of the pens. The other ranchers were grouped in front of the feed shed, watching, their eyes shifting between Pete and Uncle Jesse. Pete was a little man, bandy-legged and thin in the shoulders, but he was clear-headed and he tried to be fair. Because of that he'd been pushed into the job of spokesman for the small ranchers from the beginning.

He stood in front of Uncle Jesse and spoke up bluntly. "Jesse, we didn't figure things would wind up like this when we paid you that visit. Now it's your hide King's after, and you don't even have an inch of grass or a cow to your name. You're not a rancher, you're a preacher. It's not your fight. We want you to leave now, go back to your place and let us handle King. We can't take a chance on him and his crew killing you. If there's going to be shooting, we'll need you to bury the dead."

Pete meant that last to be grimly funny but he guessed wrong. I don't think Uncle Jesse even heard it. It was what Pete had said before that caught his attention and as it sank in his face darkened and his throat muscles contracted with low words.

"You mean, Pete, you and the others expect Lafe King to come here armed and with his crew, for the purpose of killing me?"

PETE had fallen back a surprised step, but he answered honestly. "Well—yes."

"You're wrong, Pete," Uncle Jesse said. "Dead wrong. When Lafe comes, he'll be alone and he won't be armed. If he is, he won't be shooting. I can guarantee you that."

Pete pressed quietly, "You're sure of that, are you, Jesse?"

"I'm sure, Pete."

"Well, then, it comes down to a question of Lafe settling it with his fists. We don't want you to do that either. Like I said, it's our fight—"

"Pete," Uncle Jesse broke in evenly, "I guess you don't realize just how much my fight it is. Lafe's my friend. And your people didn't ask me to do what I did last night. I did it myself—and maybe, Pete, I did it just as much for Lafe as I did for you and Greenway and the rest."

Pete looked intently at Uncle Jesse. He hadn't figured Uncle Jesse'd done it for Lafe at all, and he wasn't sure he believed it, but I did. Talk had failed with Lafe, so something had to be done. Well, Uncle Jesse'd done it, hoping it would do what talking hadn't and wake Lafe up.

But there was more to it than that. I knew Uncle Jesse was hoping there'd be no fight. He was hoping that when Lafe got to town, he'd have learned his lesson, that he'd take it like a man. But the hope was so small, so far-fetched, that to Uncle Jesse it was more of a taunt, than a comfort.

Pete said, "I wish you'd change your mind, Jesse."

If Pete didn't see the deep quiet pain in Uncle Jesse's face, I did. "I won't, Pete."

"All right," Pete said, resigned. He turned and walked back to the other ranchers and I could see him talking to them. Uncle Jesse put his arm on the fence again and went back to his memories.

Lafe King was a high-spirited, natural-born comic. We found that out the year we stayed with him. When he was feeling good he'd go climb a wall. He'd take a run at it, jump, plant one foot against it and the other a little higher. He'd twist his lanky frame gracefully as he came down so that his boots always hit the floor before he did. Sometimes he'd act so crazy he'd get Uncle Jesse a little crazy too, and they'd wind up wrestling among the bark peelings on the floor of the new house Lafe was building.

That was the year the Shouldices and the MacCombers came into the country. Uncle Jesse did a lot of calling around that year, laying the groundwork for his church. When he'd get back from a trip to see an isolated rancher and his family, he and Lafe would work on the house, but it was all the same to him if Lafe wasn't there. He'd get busy with ax and hammer and throw up a few more feet of wall even if Lafe was up on the back ranges riding herd. Then one October day before the first snow flew, we moved out of the old damp sod house into the airy snug new one.

By that time Uncle Jesse'd settled on the site for the church. Before the snow was off the ground in the spring he and Lafe were hauling logs from Lafe's populär stand and planning and squaring and fitting, and in early June the church and a two-roomed parsonage were ready. Lafe wouldn't let Uncle Jesse pay for the logs; it was his way of thanking him for the work he'd put in on the ranchhouse.

Uncle Jesse and I moved our few belongings from Lafe's house into the parsonage, and the church opened the Sunday after that. Lafe was there, peering out the door and down the corduroy road, more concerned than Uncle Jesse that no one would come. But come they did, fourteen of them, the Greenways and Moffats and MacCombers and Shouldices. Lafe greeted everyone, even the children, joyfully at the door.

When the service was over, he wasn't the same exuberant Lafe who'd welcomed the small congregation. He was solemn, quietly dignified. "I'm glad for you, Jesse. You preached a fine sermon and people liked you. I know they did. You're set now, you've started your church and all you have to do is watch it grow."

Uncle Jesse regarded him with slow puzzlement. "If you're so glad for me, why the long face?"

"Because it's the end of our wrestling around and acting the fools. I'm just an ordinary cowhand, but you're a leader in these parts now. And I don't aim to spoil things for you with a lot of foolishness. Folks can't respect a man they catch wrestling around with a cowhand in a bunch of shavings on the floor."

Uncle Jesse said slowly, "I see." Then he sighed, quietly, inwardly. "I'm sorry you feel that way about it, Lafe. You needn't."

"It wasn't you sitting in the back row listening to a fine preacher, Jesse."

"All right," Uncle Jesse said simply. He walked out of the church with Lafe, shook hands with him, watched him start toward his horse. Then he went into the parsonage. Lafe was mounted and had started to ride away when he came out. He was shaking out the rope Lafe had given him and taught him to use.

"Lafe," he said sharply, and in the second that Lafe reined up and looked over his shoulder, the rope whistled through the air. The loop dropped over Lafe's hatbrimb and settled snugly around his shoulders. Uncle Jesse jerked, not hard like he would have for a frisky half-grown calf, but hard enough to throw Lafe off balance so that he had to kick the stirrups free and leave the saddle.

He landed on his feet, but he was off-balance and he fell. Uncle Jesse went hand-over-hand on the rope toward him, keeping it taut so Lafe couldn't get to his feet, and the next thing I knew they were wrestling in the dirt in a tangle of rope and boots and Sunday coattails. I caught a glimpse of Lafe's face under Uncle Jesse's elbow, red and angry and

surprised, and then Uncle Jesse's back blotted it out.

They wrestled in earnest for about half a minute and then a choked voice came out of the muddle of arms and legs. "You lop-eared son of a ring-tailed bobcat—"

It was Lafe. He broke off in a wheeze of laughter and they sat up winded and blowing, fighting for breath. Then their glances spotted something behind me and their grins slowly disappeared leaving their faces vacant with surprise.

I turned, ready to run in a case it was one of the brown bears that ventured out of the timber sometimes, but it was only a girl. She'd been in church that morning with her trim full-skirted suit of gray material, primly holding her hymn-book with both gloved hands.

She looked steadily at Lafe and Uncle Jesse, faint disapproval in her face, and after a minute in which he seemed frozen to the ground, Uncle Jesse got up slowly and brushed himself off.

For all his calmness I could see that his neck was red as he walked toward the girl. He didn't look at Lafe, whose lips were compressed in a line that said I told you so.

He said gravely, "Madam, I owe you an apology. Mrs. MacComber introduced us before the service this morning, but your name seems to have slipped my mind."

THE girl's eyebrows lifted a little. She studied Uncle Jesse, straightening out something in her mind. She said, "I'm Susan Appleby. I'm a spy."

Uncle Jesse's chuckle was a little forced. "A spy? Well, now."

"My father is the minister of the Anglican Church in Fort MacLeod."

Silence. Uncle Jesse swiped his hand over his hair. "Oh—"

I looked at Lafe. He'd clasped his arms around his knees and he was waiting for the victory. But when I looked back at Susan Appleby, she was smiling. She said, "Don't let me frighten you, Mr. Clayton. I intend to take my father a glowing report of your work here."

Uncle Jesse studied her. "You do?"

"Yes. In fact—" She looked down at her hymn-book. "I was so impressed with your service this morning, I came back to offer to help you wherever you could use me."

Uncle Jesse's voice was a little dazed. "You did?"

"Yes."

Lafe got up quickly then, intending to settle the issue while it was still at hand. His bony face was earnest when he spoke to Susan Appleby. "Now, honestly, Miss Appleby, what do you think of a preacher wrestling around like that, never mind it being Sunday morning, but any time?"

Susan Appleby said wistfully, "I think it's wonderful."

Lafe and Uncle Jesse looked at each other and then at Susan Appleby. Uncle Jesse said gratefully, "Thank you, Miss Appleby," and I knew he meant it.

If Lafe had anything else to say, he swallowed it. He shrugged, let his hands slap to his sides. He scooped up his hat from the ground and walked to his horse. He said goodbye to us from the saddle and when the evergreens swallowed him up down the road, he was still shaking his head.

On Sunday mornings after that Susan Appleby took the children into the parsonage kitchen for a Sunday School class instead of having them squirming through the sermons. A year passed, and then one day Uncle Jesse started planning and talking to himself, and the next thing I knew he was hauling more logs and building another room on the parsonage. I knew why, too, and I was glad it was going to be Susan Appleby.

Susan's father married them in the Anglican Church in Fort MacLeod. Lafe, of course, was best man, and the day before the wedding he halted his wagon in front of the parsonage with their wedding present. The wagon was covered with a tarpaulin and was dripping water suspiciously. It held four quartered beeves packed in ice, enough meat to last Susan and Uncle Jesse and I a whole year.

Uncle Jesse took Susan to Fort Benton for a honeymoon trip and I stayed at Lafe's. I was fourteen then, but I hadn't forgotten how to handle a horse and rope the way Lafe had taught me two years before. He not only let me ride for him, he paid me for it. Uncle

Jesse tried to give the money back when he got home, but Lafe wouldn't take it.

After that I rode for Lafe every spring and fall for four or five years. Then Lafe hired two full-time cowboys and he didn't need me any more. It was just as well, because there were two little tow-headed boys in the parsonage now and I had my hands full trying to keep them out of trouble.

The church was growing and so was Lafe's Lazy LK spread. It was hard to tell who was the busier, Uncle Jesse or Lafe. Then one day the whispers started, ugly and meaningful. Uncle Jesse tried not to hear them, but the time came when he had to. They were about Lafe.

The fall cattle sales were a month away, which had sparked the flame of ugly talk. The small ranchers were calling Lafe a range-hog. Well, that wasn't quite true. Lafe didn't own a foot of fence outside his corrals, and what was open range to him was open range to his neighbors.

I guess there was just no better way of putting what Lafe did year after year. The small ranchers made scattered sales to the Mounted Police and the railway gangs throughout the year, but the fall sales in Fort MacLeod were the big ones. Lafe would take a hundred head or so of his cattle to the pens there. There was always plenty of room left over in the pens for the small ranchers' cattle, but the buyers, Severidge and the others, bought Lafe's, and you couldn't blame them. Lafe had the best range, so he had the fattest cattle. And the buyers seldom bought more than a hundred head at a time, so they'd buy all Lafe's to save themselves the trouble of dealing with half a dozen ranchers when they could deal with one.

So actually in a way you couldn't blame Lafe. He wasn't doing anything illegal. All the same, it worried Uncle Jesse. He didn't want to see Lafe doing something like that, while it was within his rights, was a little on the greedy side. Ranch business kept Lafe away from church quite often, so one morning after the service when he hadn't been to service for the third time in a row, Uncle Jesse saddled up and rode the thirty miles to the LK spread to see him.

I went with him. We found Lafe sprawled out on the sofa in the parlor, sound asleep, dressed in sweat-stained working clothes and with a stubble of beard on his face.

Uncle Jesse brusquely shook him awake. He said, half in jest and wholly in earnest, "If you're too busy to get to church once a month, Lafe, you're too busy."

Lafe swung his boots to the floor and grinned ruefully. "I guess you're right, Jesse. We had to go to Sheep Creek a few days back to comb some strays out of the timber. It was rough going. We didn't get back until dawn this morning."

"I see," Uncle Jesse said absently. He sat on the sofa beside Lafe and studied his clasped hands, and I knew he was thinking of how he would say what else was on his mind. After a minute he came at it in a roundabout way.

"I hear you sent a whole quartered beef over to Sam Shouldice's when Mrs. Shouldice was sick. That was good of you."

"It was nothing, Jesse."

"Maybe if Sam had sold some of his own beef to Severidge last fall, you wouldn't have had to send over your beef."

"Guess not, Jesse."

THE silence that followed was thoughtful on Uncle Jesse's part, natural and unstrained on Lafe's. Lafe just didn't see what Uncle Jesse was driving at, and Uncle Jesse knew it. He swiped a smear of dust from his pants, sighed, and took the bull by the horns.

"Lafe, did you ever consider taking say, fifty head of cattle to MacLeod for the sales instead of a hundred?"

Lafe's face came around, surprised, curious. "No. Why?"

"Because it would give the small ranchers a chance to sell their cattle, that's why. The buyer would take your fifty, then maybe ten of Sam's, ten of Pete's, and so on. Which would be fair, Lafe. A sort of percentage basis, going by the size of the ranches."

Lafe had come to his feet and was striding slowly up and down, peering at Uncle Jesse. There was more curiosity in his voice than anger.

"Did somebody send you here, Jesse?"

"No. But I won't keep the truth from you, Lafe. The small ranchers are talking about you. They're tired of you making a clean sweep at the sales every fall while they come away without so much as a single head sold."

Lafe stood with his head cocked, a hand to back of neck. His eyes never left Uncle Jesse's. "I don't follow you, Jesse. Or maybe it's Sam and Pete and the rest I don't follow. They've always had the same chance to sell their cattle I've had. Every last head they wanted to sell was there in the pens alongside mine. I can't help it if the buyers take mine. I don't beg them to, Jesse."

Uncle Jesse rose quietly. "That's not the point, Lafe. The point is the buyers do take yours, all of them. That leaves the small ranchers out in the cold. They'd like to sell their cattle too, Lafe."

Lafe's voice, although still gentle, was decidedly flat. "Don't misunderstand, Jesse. I'm not singing the old tune of I was here first. But I didn't ask them to come here. Neither did I fight them when they came. And I know many a Texan who would have fenced free range and called it his the minute a small rancher hove into sight."

After a minute Uncle Jesse let out a long deep breath. I knew there was more he wanted to say, a lot more. But he only moved toward the door, paused and lumped the whole of what he still wanted to say into a few words. "They're your neighbors, Lafe."

Lafe answered without batting an eyes. "They're also my competitors."

"All right," Uncle Jesse said mildly, but what he really meant hung heavy in the room. You're wrong, Lafe, and you know it. Then a smile struggled across his face. "If you don't look out, somebody's going to lay claim to your place on the back-row bench Sunday mornings."

Lafe grinned faintly. "You tell them that place is spoken for, Reverend."

It ended there, but I knew it hadn't ended at all. It had only started. The fall sales went the same way that year as they had before, and if Lafe saw the hard looks thrown his way as he rode out of town with his crew, he ignored them.

Winter passed into spring and summer. Every chance he got, Uncle Jesse talked to Lafe about the way he sold his cattle, but he might as well have talked to the barnyard fence. And Lafe didn't like being told his business, either. You could tell things weren't right between them in spite of their trying to pretend they were.

July faded into August. The fall sales drew nearer and lines appeared around Uncle Jesse's eyes and mouth. It wasn't because Sam and Pete and Greenway and the others, hard-pressed for cash, pretty well had to sell their beef this time or go broke, either. It was because Lafe King was deliberately shutting his eyes to the hardships he was forcing on his neighbors.

Early in September Pete Moffat dismounted stiffly one morning in front of the parsonage. He was backed by a silent mounted semi-circle of half a dozen ranchers, and Uncle Jesse went out to speak with them. Susan and I listened from the doorway, hearing Pete come right to the point.

"We've come to see what you can do, Jesse. We know King's stand, and we grant him the right to sell all the cattle he can. But not at our expense. If he's going to starve us out at the sales, he might as well have fenced the range when we came in. There's something wrong with a man who can make out the country's big enough for everybody and then eight years later see his neighbors' kids go barefoot while he wrecks the market with his cattle."

You might have thought Uncle Jesse hadn't heard. He stood unmoving and the sunlight laid a stubby shadow behind him. I felt I could read his thoughts. There's something wrong with a man—something wrong with Lafe King.

His sigh lifted his shoulders. "I know, Pete. I know. But I've done all I can. I've talked to him until I can't talk any more. What else can I do?"

Pete's face was suddenly tired. He stared moodily at the ground. "Yes. What else?" He turned and mounted and spoke heavily from the saddle. "Well, thanks anyway, Jesse."

He kneed his horse toward the road and the others fell in behind him.

UNCLE JESSE tried once more. He came back from Lafe's silent and sombre. Susan poured him a cup of coffee he let it grow cold on the table at his elbow. Three days passed, four. The day before the sale came, whipping winds piled up thunderheads that dropped scattered showers all day. Suppertime came, then darkness. I polished my saddle in a corner of the kitchen while Susan sat mending by the light of the lamp on the table.

Uncle Jesse had gone restlessly from pacing, to sitting, to aimless walking. Suddenly he wheeled to lean across the table toward Susan, his hands clenched into fists on the oilcloth, and the light from the lamp fell harshly on his haggard face. It wasn't the small ranchers he was talking about, it was Lafe.

"Susan, am I my brother's keeper?"

Susan's swift fear was inward. All the same, I saw it. I knew she wanted to say no, to tell him Lafe's business wasn't his responsibility. You could have heard a spider walk across the floor while she looked at him, and there were tears on her lashes when she finally spoke huskily.

"Yes, dear. "

Uncle Jesse straightened up from the table and strode from the kitchen. He went out to the shed, caught up his saddle, strode out to his horse tethered under a cottonwood. I followed him, but without looking up from buckling the cinch-strap, he said, "Not this time, Johnny."

I watched him ride away. When the last hoofbeats had faded into the air I went back into the parsonage. Susan and I spent most of the night looking at each other over the lamp, talking little, listening for returning hoofbeats that didn't come.

At dawn I saddled up and rode to Fort MacLeod. I met Lafe's riders on the road, driving fifty-five head of LK steers back to the ranch. They told me what had happened. Uncle Jesse had dusted into town an hour after daylight. Everyone that had cattle for sale was there then, and Uncle Jesse had laid it on the line for Lafe's riders. They could take back fifty-five head or fight the small ranchers to keep them in the pens, but Uncle Jesse's grim face helped them decide they weren't getting paid to fight.

Lafe, of course, wasn't there. Uncle Jesse had taken him by surprise at the ranch the night before, locked the cook and the one remaining rider in the bunkhouse and run off the horses before Lafe tumbled half-asleep through the ranchhouse door to see him hazing the horses out the corral gate and into the wooded ravine behind the LK buildings.

It was silent and taut at the cattle-pens now, the sale over and cash money in the pockets of Pete and Sam and the others. Every eye was peeled to the cleft in the hills that opened onto the prairie and the town. Sam Shouldice, with the eye of a hawk, spotted the distant haze first. He stood up in the stirrups the better to peer at the hills. "Here he comes." He added sombrely, "He's alone."

Uncle Jesse stirred like a man waking from sleep. He stepped away from the pens and looked at the growing dust-cloud, then a long deep breath left him and he turned and called to Pete, "Where's Lafe's money?"

"At the bank."

He turned and crossed the street toward the bank, half a block from the pens. When he disappeared through the door you could hear hoofbeats, distant and rhythmic. When Uncle Jesse came out, horse and rider were clear to the eye beyond the edge of town. With a brown envelope in his hand, Jesse stopped on the steps of the bank and waited. Five minutes later Lafe King's laboring horse swept around the curve into town and reappeared on the street beyond the pens.

Lafe slackened pace abreast of the pens, searching faces. Not finding the one he wanted, his eyes swept the street and halted on the steps of the bank. He lifted the blowing horse from its walk into a run again and slid from the saddle in a swirl of dust at the bottom of the bank's steps.

I'd walked up the street from the pens so that I was directly across from the bank. I saw Uncle Jesse read Lafe's face and I saw the last of hope fade from his own. He dropped the envelope at Lafe's feet. Not to be dramatic, he simply wanted his hands free, because he knew he was going to need them that way. He said gently, "Your money, Lafe," and left the next move up to Lafe.

Lafe didn't so much as glance at the envelope on the ground. I couldn't see his face,

but I heard the earnest quiet passison in his voice. "You ran off my horses and left me hamsrtung in my own front yard. You scared off my men and broke up my herd. You can't do that to me, Jesse. Not even you."

HE SWUNG his fist hard at Uncle Jesse's head. Uncle Jesse ducked so that it only grazed him, but he tripped over the steps and fell. Lafe lunged on top of him, raining blows that had little weight behind them because he couldn't get his knees braced on the steps.

Locked together, they rolled from the steps onto the ground and I saw Lafe scoop a handful of dirt into Uncle Jesse's face.

He shouldn't have done it. I knew up until then Uncle Jesse had only meant to defend himself. Now he figured Lafe really needed to be cut down to size.

He brought his knee up into Lafe's stomach and came to his feet while Lafe rolled doubled up on the ground.

Lafe got up with a new wariness in his eye, but it only embittered the fight. He drove in with both fists flashing and when a solid blow to the side of the head drove him back, I noticed that Uncle Jesse's face was smeared with blood.

Uncle Jesse's fists rocked Lafe to his bootheels when they landed, but although he had the weight, Lafe had the agility. It gave Lafe the best of the fight. He slowly forced Uncle Jesse to give ground along the bank's sandstone wall. There was a hardware store on the corner with a three-sided porch. They fought up the steps, knocking over bales of chickenwire and kegs of nails. They fell down the other side and dragged themeslves up, their shirts torn to ribbons and even their hair spattered with blood.

The awed silent crowd of ranchers and townspeople moved with them. They fought down the main street, dazed and blinded. It ended in front of the blacksmith shop. Uncle Jesse went backwards from Lafe's last tired blow and stumbled over a broken singletree somebody'd left lying around. He fell heavily and lay still, eyes closed, head and shoulders in the sun, the rest of him sprawled in the shade of the blacksmith shop.

The only sound in the street was Lafe King's heavy breathing. He stood weaving and barely conscious, trying to gather his wits, his unfocused eyes searching for something to locate him in time and place.

They wandered from across the street to the broken singletree, clearing a little. They moved to Uncle Jesse's figure. They stayed there, and all of a sudden two clean gullies appeared in the caking blood and dirt on his cheeks.

His lips framed a croak of a word. "Jesse?"

No answer. Lafe lifted a foot and set it down, then the other. He fell to his knees beside Uncle Jesse. He put a hand under his head and lifted it unsteadily.

"Jesse?"

The head in his hand stayed a dead weight. The gullies on Lafe's cheeks widened. "Jesse, I want you to hear. It ain't worth it. I'll do what you want. You hear me, Jesse? Not for them, for you. I'll do it for you—"

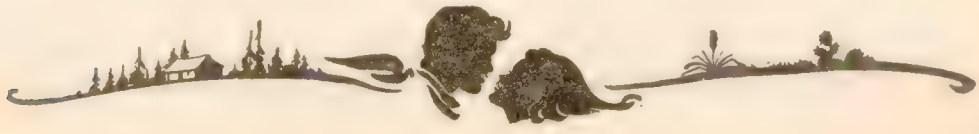
He was looking into Uncle Jesse's opening wincing eyes. A hollow whisper came from lips too swollen to smile. "Say it—again, Lafe."

Lafe swiped the back of his hand across his nose. His voice was steadier now.

"I'll do what you want, Jesse. I'll sell my cattle like you said, on a percentage basis. There's nothing worth us fighting over. Nothing in the world."

They didn't need words after that. When they had the strength they clambered to their feet. Uncle Jesse looked once at the jubilant faces of Clem Greenway and Sam and Pete and the others, and forgot them.

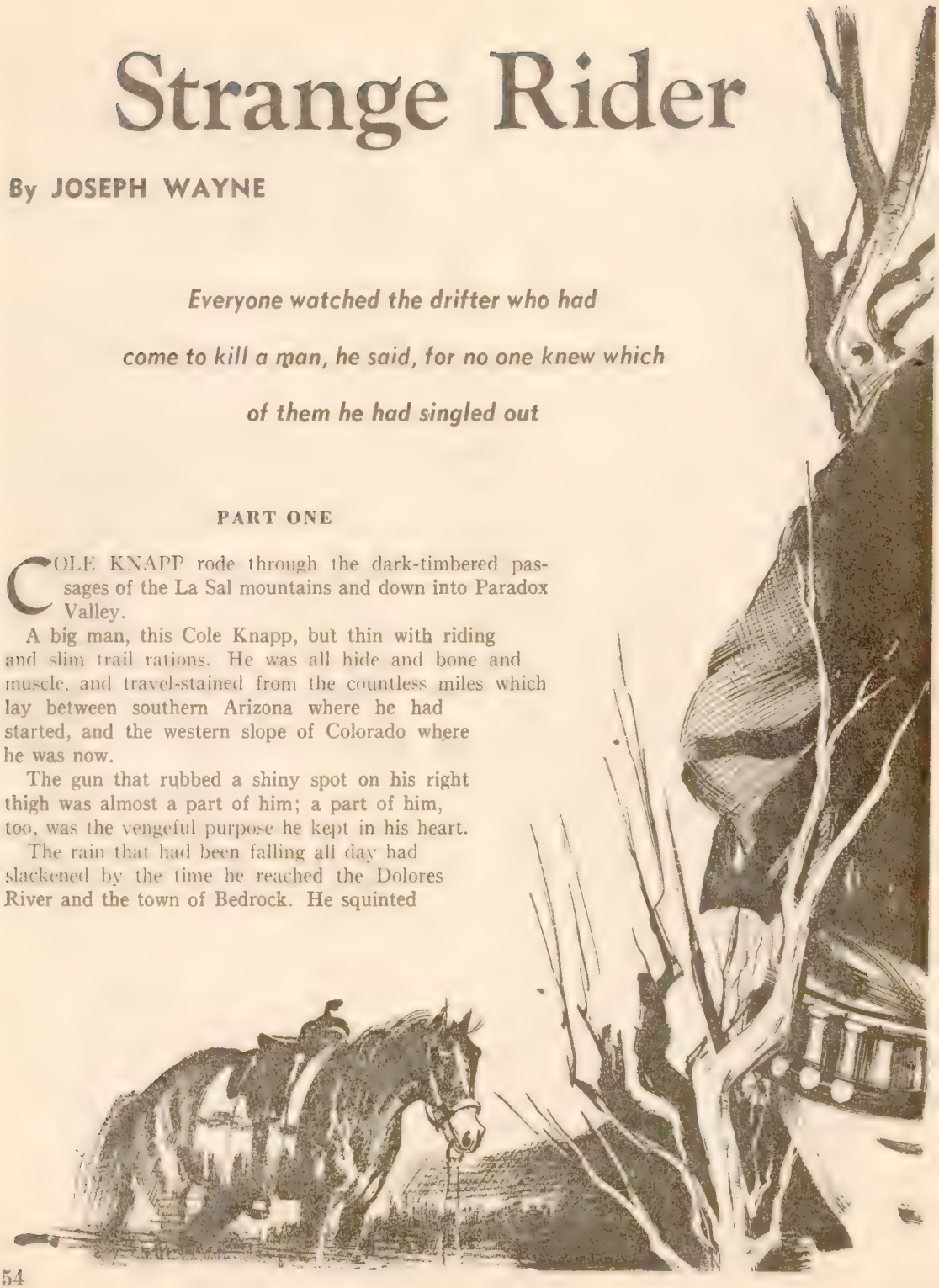
He put his arm around Lafe, and Lafe did the same. And they made their unsteady way to the hotel to wash off the dirt of the only fight they ever had.



# Strange Rider

By JOSEPH WAYNE

*Everyone watched the drifter who had come to kill a man, he said, for no one knew which of them he had singled out*



PART ONE

COLE KNAPP rode through the dark-timbered passages of the La Sal mountains and down into Paradox Valley.

A big man, this Cole Knapp, but thin with riding and slim trail rations. He was all hide and bone and muscle, and travel-stained from the countless miles which lay between southern Arizona where he had started, and the western slope of Colorado where he was now.

The gun that rubbed a shiny spot on his right thigh was almost a part of him; a part of him, too, was the vengeful purpose he kept in his heart.

The rain that had been falling all day had slackened by the time he reached the Dolores River and the town of Bedrock. He squinted

at it with cold discomfort. Not much of a town, but he hadn't expected much. A schoolhouse, a store, a blacksmith shop and a saloon. Over the one door was a weathered, bullet-pocked sign, half-obliterated but still readable, "Gold Nugget Saloon."

Two horses were tied at the hitch pole, heads down, rumps to the wind and rain. On their dripping hides was the Anchor brand, and when Cole saw this, he reined in, stepped down and tied.

Inside the saloon he saw the two Anchor men, who studied Cole with curious neutrality. One was tall with a thin, pock-marked face. The other was short and dark of skin. Run-of-the-mill cowhands, Cole thought.

"What'll it be?" the bartender asked, swiping idly with a damp cloth in front of Cole.

"Whisky," Cole said.

He rang a coin on the bar as a bottle and a glass were placed before him. And now he dropped his careful bombshell, "I'm a stranger hereabouts. I'm looking for a man named Andy Carew. Know where I can find him?"

From a corner of his eye he saw the two cowboys' faces tighten with quick interest, he saw their hastily exchanged glances, and he saw the curtain of caution drop down across their eyes.

The bartender motioned toward them. "They work for the Carews. Maybe they can tell you, but me, I never heard of an Andy Carew."

"We didn't, either," the tall cowboy said. He hitched at his pants and turned from the bar, trying to appear casual. "See you some other time, Mick."

"Wait a minute," Cole said. "If you're working for the Carews, it's damned funny you never heard of Andy."

Both men were edging toward the door. The short one muttered without looking at Cole. "We've only been on the payroll since April. If there ever was an Andy Carew, he was gone a long time before that."

The tall one added, "Only one Carew left now, mister. A girl. It's her that owns Anchor. Old Bill Carew cashed in his chips last month." He turned to his partner. "We'd better ride or Marty'll be wantin' to know what we do to earn our thirty and beans."

They left, hurrying, and plainly relieved to be getting out of the saloon. Cole turned back to the bartender. "They've heard of Andy Carew, all right. Any fool could tell that."

The bartender was silent, his eyes telling Cole nothing. So Cole asked, "Who's this Marty they mentioned?"

The bartender shrugged. "Marty Keldson. He's ramrod of Anchor. I think he's some kind of shirt-tail relation to the Carew tribe."

"How did old man Carew die? Sudden?"

"A stroke. He was getting on." The bartender moved away and picked up the glasses the Anchor hands had left. As Cole swung around toward the door, the bartender called, "Don't you want your drink?"

"You drink it," Cole said. "I got what I came for."

He paused on the porch, watching the Anchor men who were riding away. They rode fast, their horses' hoofs throwing up great gobs of mud behind. They hit the bridge spanning the Dolores' and hoofs thudded against the sodden planks. At the far side they looked back.

Cole smiled wryly as he mounted. By sundown or sooner, Marty Keldson would know there was a stranger in the country, and he'd know that a stranger was asking for Andy Carew.

BY LATE afternoon he had left the valley, swinging to the south across a broken country of mesas covered by cedars and piñon pines. The trail threaded up through the gaps in the rimrock and across a boulder-strewn arroyo, then on to the next steep slope.

A good grass country, for all that the grass grew in bunches instead of a mat of sod. Therefore a good stock country, Cole thought. And it seemed to stretch away to infinity. He passed no ranches, not even a nester's shack, but there were steers on these mesas, fine and fat and sleek of hide. Four-year-olds, he judged, which would weigh close to thirteen hundred pounds after the summer on this grass.

Anchor range, reaching from the Dolores behind him to Lord knew where in all directions. Its vastness spoke well for Bill Carew. Or did it? Cole knew there was always the other side, the side of little men with dreams

and hopes, men who had settled here and been moved on by Anchor guns.

Near sunset he rode down off the last mesa. A long valley opened before him, a valley with a brawling stream running through it between walls of willow shoots. At the base of the mesa, the stream swung north toward the San Miguel, which, Cole knew, was a tributary of the Dolores.

Ahead of Cole was a town, a small and peaceful town called Cedar which for years had lived under the shadow of Anchor.

Somewhere in town was a lawyer, Judge Fred Benson. Cole would see him in the morning. Not tonight. No sense to hurry. This was like a poker hand upon which you must bet blind. Tomorrow would be time enough.

He made camp between the stream and a deserted stone cabin that stood fifty feet from the willows. After he had eaten he stepped into the cabin out of pure curiosity and began to kick around in the debris.

Not much left, just the stone walls and the roof. A splintered table leaned crazily against one wall. The legs of a chair stood overturned in one corner and near them was the cracked head of a doll, its body chewed away by rats. He went outside, mildly depressed and glad to be in the open.

He knew exactly the kind of man Bill Carew had been, the kind of man he must have been to build a ranch like Anchor. And he could guess what had happened in this cabin and had happened in a dozen other places up and down the creek and out on the mesas, wherever there was water.

To these places families had brought their dreams, the promise of a bright tomorrow. But the Anchor crew would come, led by this giant of a man, this formidable Bill Carew, and their guns would be close to their hands. Perhaps there would be a few shots if the nester was stubborn. But always the ultimatum: "Keep moving. You can't settle here. This is Anchor range and it will always be Anchor range."

And so they had left. Miles down the trail, a little girl might have remembered her doll and wept, but a frightened father would not turn back. There were other lands, and other dolls, but no life once the spark had gone.

Cole lost track of time. He was tired, but oddly enough, not sleepy.

What was the Carew girl like? And the foreman, Marty Keldson? Could a ranch, which had grown fat over the clean-picked bones of little men, ever change its methods? Or would it always be the predatory force Bill Carew had made it until it was worn to nothing by the erosion of time?

SUDDENLY Cole became aware of the steady beat of horses coming toward him across the grass. Without thinking, he rose and moved away from the fire toward the stone wall of the cabin. This was something he had learned long ago. A man didn't stay by the fire in a strange country.

The horses were closer now, coming hard from the east. While they were still a distance away, another rider burst into the pool of light. Cole, surprised, saw that it was a girl.

She called, "Who's there? Answer me. Who's there?"

Cole stepped away from the wall. "What's the matter?"

"Who are you?"

The pursuers were closer now. He said, "Get down. Hide in the willows. Quick."

She obeyed, not questioning him. He slipped the bridle from the mare and slapped her rump with it, hard. The mare ran off into the darkness. Cole flung the bridle onto his own pile of gear and stepped back to the wall.

Now the pursuing riders were upon him, pulling up just outside the fringe of firelight, one of them throwing his rough voice at Cole, "You see anybody, mister? Or hear a horse?"

Cole's hand touched the grip of his gun. He knew that they could see him no more clearly than he saw them. He said, "I heard a horse."

"Which way was he going?"

"West, friend. Where else could he go, with you coming at him from the east?"

They went on at once, hoofs drumming solidly against the ground until at last all sound was lost. But they'd be back. The mare wouldn't run very hard without a rider. Even if they didn't find the mare, they'd return, suspicious, when they reached the end of the valley, and they'd question him.

He saw the girl moving out of the willow thicket, still a shadowy figure in the darkness. He called softly, "Stay there. They'll be back."

She asked, "Who are you?"

"My name's Cole Knapp. What's yours?" He liked her voice, now that most of the panic was out of it.

"Sidonie Carew," she answered.

He could still see her, a vaguely lighted shape at the edge of the willows, and he searched his mind for some explanation to fit this strange situation. Here was the Carew girl who owned Anchor. But why, of all the people in the valley, was she being chased?

He heard the horses again, still traveling hard, coming back. He said quickly, "Go deeper into the willows and stay perfectly still. No matter what happens, don't come out. You understand?"

She did not answer, but he heard her moving back.

Again he stepped toward the cabin so he would have the stone wall to his back. And he waited, while the approaching hoofbeats grew from a distant rumble to an almost ground-shaking thunder.

This time the three riders swept into the firelight before they reined in. From the milling group of plunging horses, the same rough voice was thrown at Cole, "What'd you do with her?"

The tone rubbed against Cole's temper like sandpaper. "Her? You chase girls in this country in packs?"

"Where is she? We know she's here, and we know it's the Carew girl. We found her mare down the valley a piece."

"Let it go, Dick," a man on the far side said. "We know what we aimed to know."

"Not yet, Pomeroy," the man called Dick said doggedly. "I want to talk to her. Where is she?"

"Talk to me if you've got to talk," Cole said.

Dick rode close and sat looking down at Cole. "Friend, you're new around here, so I'll tell you something you'd better know. I'm Dick Walters, President of the Regulators. I want to talk to the girl. Now for the last time, where's she at?"

"All right, so you're a big man on this range, but you're wasting your time. There's no girl here to talk to you."

"I figure there is. And I figure she's in that cabin. I'm going to have a look."

Walters moved as though to dismount. Cole's thumb slipped from his cartridge belt and his hand fell naturally to the grips of his gun. He said, "Stay on your horse, mister. Stay on your horse, and I'll tell you something you'd better know. I came here to kill a man. Maybe it's you and maybe it ain't. But don't push. Don't ever try to push me."

THE MAN on the far side spoke again, this time with quick alarm. "All right, all right. Dick ain't pushin' you. We don't make a habit of chasin' girls, neither. But she was spyin' on our meetin' tonight. We figured it was an Anchor cowhand and we were fixin' to teach him a lesson."

"Now you know it wasn't, so drag it, boys, drag it."

Walters called out furiously, intemperately, "Don't let me see you around here again! We know how to handle your kind."

The man whirled his horse and set his spurs. The three disappeared into the night, riding as hard as they had ridden before.

Cole waited until the sound of retreating hoofs died to the east, then he called, "You can come out now. I don't think they'll be back."

He stooped and threw several sticks of wood upon the fire. When he straightened, she was standing before him in the firelight. "Thank you, Mr. Knapp," she said, her voice calm. "I doubt if they'd have hurt me, but I didn't want to talk to them and I'm glad I didn't have to."

Cole said nothing. Standing on the other side of the fire from her, he had his first good chance to observe Sidonie Carew. She was about twenty, he judged, slender and straight-backed and proud. Yet her pride was not the haughty arrogance he might have expected to find in Bill Carew's daughter. Instead, it was a quiet thing of dignity and self-assurance.

Her features were regular, the cheekbones a trifle high. Her eyes were either gray or blue. He couldn't quite be sure in the poor light from the fire.

But the thing which impressed him most, and this surprised him, was her calm straightforwardness. She was not, he told himself, the spoiled and pampered daughter of a wealthy rancher. This was a girl with a level head and an honest set of values.

She glanced at him and smiled, her composure returned. "I suppose you're wondering about several things."

Cole nodded.

"The Regulators Walters mentioned are a bunch of greasy-sack ranchers who live above the town of Cedar," she said. "A hardcase named Bud Davis was their leader until he was killed a few months ago. Now Walters has taken his place. They're jealous of Anchor because it's big. They're lazy, too. They live off our beef, and they'll steal our grass if they can. But Anchor belongs to me and I don't intend to let them steal our range."

She looked at her boot and toed the edge of the fire. "My father died last month." She lifted her head and he saw something that was almost defiance in her eyes. "Dad was the best cowman for two hundred miles around. He wouldn't have left me the biggest spread on the western slope if he hadn't been. Now he's gone, so men like Walters think they can start chipping away at Anchor."

"They said you'd been spying on them."

"I was." She laughed embarrassedly. "I should have let one of my men do it. But I heard they were having a meeting and I wanted to know what they were planning. I tried to listen at Walters' window, but I stumbled and made a noise. I got scared and ran instead of facing them. They came after me and you know the rest."

Cole rolled a cigarette. Bending over the fire, he lighted it with a flaming twig. He wondered if her story were as simple and straight-forward as it sounded. Were the Regulators chipping away at Anchor, or was the shoe on the other foot? Maybe she did own Anchor, but did she run it? It was an important question as far as Cole was concerned, but he had no right to ask it now.

He straightened, and tossed the twig back into the fire. He thought her face was flushed, but she said steadily enough, "I'm wondering about you, too."

"What's that?"

"You said you were going to kill a man."

Cole laughed easily. "Talk. Just big talk."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"I'll saddle up and see if I can find your mare," Cole said. "Then I'll take you home."

"You don't need to do that."

"No, I don't need to, but I'm going to."

He turned from her, picked up his bridle and walked to his horse. He saddled the animal and rode down the creek, leaving the girl at the fire staring after him.

WHY DIDN'T she want him to take her home? He considered it, wondering what was wrong. Would seeing Anchor, its crew and foreman, prove her previous claim against the small ranchers to be untrue. He suspected it would.

For a moment she stared at him, her jaw set firmly, her skin flaming. The eyes, he decided, were blue, but right now they looked like ice.

His gaze, amused but not unkind, held hers until at last she said stiffly, "I guess I can't stop you if you insist on riding with me."

"That's right," he said.

She rode out of the circle of firelight, and Cole swung to the saddle and fell in beside her.

For a time they followed the creek, winding through the willows and deadfalls along a path apparently familiar to Sidonie. Then they left it, and crossed a grassy expanse of meadow, afterward climbing through low, cedar-covered hills. At last they struck a road which wound upward in a series of switchbacks to the top of the mesa.

The valley stretched below them, and in its center Cole saw a tight, little group of lights, the town of Cedar. This fitted the pattern which was beginning to form in Cole's mind.

A man like Bill Carew would look down upon other men. He would build his ranch as high as he could, holding in contempt the timid ones who depended upon each other for protection as well as for company.

The buildings of Anchor were directly ahead of them. Cole asked, "Was this the original location of the ranch?"

She didn't answer at once, and he felt her

hostility in the hesitation. At last she said, "No, the old place was about five miles from here."

"Then these buildings are new?"

"They're eight years old."

"Why did your father move here?"

"He never told me. Why are you so interested, Mr. Knapp?"

"I've got an inquiring mind, Miss Carew."

They reined in before the house. As Cole stepped down, Sidonie said, "You were going to bring me home, Mr. Knapp. You have."

Cole looped his reins around the hitch pole. He said, "I was raised kind of proper, ma'am. I'll see you to your door."

She swung down and stood close to him, looking up. "You helped me and I told you I was grateful," she said. "What else am I supposed to do?"

"Take me into the house. Maybe your mother will offer me a cup of coffee."

"My mother died when I was small."

"I'm sorry." He paused, then added, "Somebody's in the house. There's sure to be coffee on the stove. Maybe Marty Keldson."

"Who are you?" Fear touched her voice, suddenly and unexpectedly.

"Knapp. Cole Knapp. I told you that."

"I know you did, but what's in a name? I heard you tell Dick Walters you came here to kill a man. Who, Mr. Knapp?"

"I don't know."

"But Marty Keldson might do for a start. Is that it?"

"You just stop being afraid, Miss Carew," he said, making his voice gentle. "All I want is a cup of coffee."

SHE STOOD not more than a step from him, her head tipped back so she could look into his face. He heard her breathing, as fast as though she had been running. Finally she said, "I own Anchor, but according to my father's will, the management of it falls upon my stepmother until I'm twenty-one. Marty is her son by a previous marriage. He's the one who really runs Anchor. He's unpredictable and dangerous, Mr. Knapp. Don't come in. Don't cross him."

"Afraid for me? Or for yourself?"

Her chin came up. "Not for myself."

"Then I'll go in. I'd like to meet Marty."

"All right," she said wearily. "I've warned you and I've begged you. Now you deserve whatever happens to you."

She whirled and walked sitff-backed along the path toward the house. He caught up and in silence followed her to the door.

Marty Keldson must be a terror, Cole thought. In spite of Sidonie's protests to the contrary, she feared him. And disliked him. Suddenly Cole discovered that he disliked Keldson, too, though he'd never met the man.

Sidonie shut the front door behind him, saying crisply, "This way, Mr. Knapp."

She opened a door on the left, and again stood aside for him to go past her into the room beyond. She closed the door. "I'll call my stepmother," she said and walked away, her boot heels making staccato clicks wherever they touched the hardwood floor.

Cole stopped, two steps away from the hall door, hat in hand, staring dumfoundedly at what he supposed was the living room of the ranch house. He didn't know what he had expected, but certainly not this.

Here was grandeur such as might have been expected in mining camps where paupers became rich overnight, where ostentatious display was the measure of the success a man had attained. Yet why such a display here, on this lonely ranch, forty miles from the nearest railroad? What had Bill Carew needed to prove?

A door opened quietly at the far end of the enormous room. Cole heard a rustle of silk, and was suddenly conscious of his own appearance. He hadn't shaved for a week. His colthes were caked with dust and sweat, and smelled of campfire smoke and horse, of the sagebrush of the plains and the pine of the mountains.

He grinned ruefully, rubbing his stubbled face. He'd practically forced his way in here and it served him right. Now he had to stay.

He remained where he was until the two women reached him. Sidonie smiled as though enjoying his discomfiture. She said, "Zelda, I want to present Mr. Cole Knapp. Mr. Knapp, this is my stepmother, Mrs. William Carew."

He found Mrs. Carew as surprising as the room in which he stood. About forty-five, she was a tall, handsome woman who carried

herself in a regal manner befitting her surroundings. Even before she spoke, he sensed that she was a woman of great pride and vanity.

Her features were regular, almost to the point of perfection. Her eyes were brown and her hair, coiled atop her head as though she sought this added height, was so black it held bluish, metallic glints. It had no hint of gray.

For a moment Mrs. Carew's dark eyes appraised him, then she smiled and offered

*"I'd do anything in the world to save your life," she said*

her hand. "Welcome to Anchor, Mr. Knapp. Sidonie tells me you went out of your way to be kind to her tonight. I'd like to add my thanks to hers."

Cole took her hand, finding it soft-skinned, and released it quickly. "No need for thanks," he said. "I'd have done—"

Sidonie broke in, "Mr. Knapp, Zelda would love to show you around. She planned this house herself, you know."

Zelda looked pleased. "Thank you, my dear." She looked at Cole, plainly trying not to notice the condition of his clothes. "My husband," she said, "died last month, as you no doubt know. The end came after a lingering illness, and I miss him terribly."

"I'm sorry."

She touched her eyes with a lace handkerchief. "He was a wonderful and generous man. He did his best to gratify every foolish whim I had."

COLE didn't speak. There was no need for it. Zelda, once started, would take care of the talking. He glanced quickly at Sidonie, detecting a definite malice in her eyes.

Zelda made a sweeping, inclusive gesture. "This is our reception room. When we built the house, Mr. Carew considered going into politics, and expected to do a great deal of entertaining. Unfortunately, he was so busy with his cattle business that he just never got started in politics."

Cole smiled, suspecting that the political ambitions had been Zelda's.

She went on, "The floor is of walnut, and the walls of solid oak paneling. It goes clear to the ceiling which, as you can see, is white with oak trim in Gothic design. We had most of the furniture made of oak to fit the decor of the room. But for my husband's sake, we had a few pieces upholstered with red plush. Mr. Carew was a man who liked his comfort."

She started across the room again, motioning graciously for him to follow. "These French doors open into the conservatory. I'd like for you to notice the vine-trellised windows and the potted palms. . . ."

Cole interrupted, "Mrs. Carew, I want to ask a question—"

She was so absorbed that she apparently didn't hear. She paused again, this time before the stone fireplace, and pointed to the huge portrait above it in a gaudy gilt frame. "Before we go into the conservatory, I'd like to show you this portrait of my husband."

Cole stared at the giant canvas. It might have been a portrait of an amiable, bewhiskered pirate, which was probably exactly what Bill Carew had been. But Cole had become impatient. He said, "Mrs. Carew, I came here to ask you about Andy."

She whirled to face him, and in that one second ceased to be the great lady and became a human being, distressed and worried. The affectation of speech and manner magically dropped away from her.

"Andy? Why do you ask about Andy?"

"I want to see him."

"He's not here." She turned to Sidonie. "It's late, dear. I'm sure Mr. Knapp will not be here much longer."

"I am a little tired," Sidonie said. "If you'll excuse me, I'll go upstairs to my room."

Halfway to the top of the stairs, she paused to look back over her shoulder, a hint of a mocking smile lingering on her lips. "Goodnight, Mr. Knapp. Or perhaps I should say good-by. Men like you are always on the move, so I'm sure I won't see you again."

Cole grinned back at her. "You'll see me. I'm done with moving on—for now at least."

It pleased him to see her smile fade, her mocking assurance leave. She gave him a long, level stare. He read concern in her face, and perhaps something akin to fear. And then she was gone.

He turned back to Zelda. She asked, "Who are you, Mr. Knapp?" her gaze as direct as her question. "Why are you here asking for Andy?"

Cole hadn't heard the opening of the hall door. He wasn't sure he heard a sound at all. But suddenly he felt another presence in the room. He glanced around. A man stood in the hall doorway, a big man in range garb who was as completely out of place in this room as Cole was.

"What's the trouble?" the man asked.

"No trouble," Zelda Carew said, quickly. "This is my son, Marty Keldson, Mr. Knapp. Now that Mr. Carew is dead, Marty is in charge of Anchor."

Keldson made no effort to be courteous. He didn't even speak. He tipped his head a bare half-inch in acknowledgement of Cole's presence and that was all. Cole nodded back, returning Keldson's bold stare.

MARTY KELDSON was nearly six feet tall, but he was heavy of bone and muscle, and broad of shoulder, so he gave the impression of being shorter. His face was wide, and almost square. His nose was a meaty blob, his mouth thin-lipped and twisted; his eyes were tiny and narrow and calculating. Something about him, perhaps his lack of courtesy, perhaps the way his muscled shoulders threatened to break through his worn blue shirt gave Cole an impression of contemptuous arrogance toward both friend and enemy.

Mrs. Carew's voice broke the silence. "I asked you some questions, Mr. Knapp."

He brought his gaze away from Keldson with an effort.

"I asked a question too, and I didn't get an answer," he said.

Her voice became fretful. "I can't tell you much about Andy. He was Sidonie's brother and my husband's only son." She put a hand on the mantel as though to steady herself. He had a feeling she was frightened, however hard she tried to conceal it.

"I haven't seen Andy for nine years," she said. "He quarreled with his father and left home. We never had a letter from him. He simply disappeared. Do you know where he is?"

"Would I be here asking for him if I knew?"

"I don't know. I don't know at all." Her fine airs were gone now. She was a distressed and frightened woman.

Cole turned toward the hall door, and discovered that Marty Keldson was gone. He reached for the knob.

"This is a troubled range, Mr. Knapp," Zelda said. "The men who call themselves the Regulators are nothing but outlaws who are trying to destroy us. You saw what happened tonight to Sidonie. I don't know what you intend to do, but whatever it is, you will only add to the trouble we already have and make trouble for yourself. You'd better leave the country."

He said, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Carew, but I've got to stay. There must be somebody somewhere who can tell me about Andy."

Protest and a frantic question were on her lips, but Cole gave her no time for either. He went out, closing the door firmly behind him. An odd smile lingered on his mouth all the way to his horse. The trap was set. Sooner or later someone would take the bait.

He untied his horse and for a moment stood motionless, troubled by a vague sense that something was wrong. A voice called to him from the shadows, "Hold it, Knapp. Hold it right where you are."

The voice was Marty Keldon's as heavy and arrogant as the man himself.

"I've got a shotgun," Keldson said. "You've been around some, friend. You know what a shotgun can do against a six-shooter at this range."

"I know." Cole held himself carefully motionless.

"Then listen, because Marty Keldson never warns a man twice. Get out of this country. Andy Carew doesn't mean a damned thing to anybody around here. He quarreled with his old man nine years ago and rode out of the country. When Bill died, we tried to trace him, but we never picked up a smell. So he's gone. Maybe dead. Now you get out of the country and leave him stay dead, or you'll be damn sorry. You savvy?"

"I'm still listening."

"Maybe I'd better make it plainer. I'm going to marry Sidonie. She owns this outfit, and I intend to see that her rights are protected. No drifting ridge runner like you is going to come around clouding her title with a stink about Andy. If he'd wanted his share of Anchor, he could have stuck around, and if you're trying to cut yourself in, you're gonna get a pine overcoat and a six-by-three piece of real estate. Now get to hell out of here."

"Finished?"

"Yeah. Get on your horse and ride. And keep riding."

There was violence in Keldson's voice, and Cole remembered what Sidonie had said about him being unpredictable.

He mounted and let his horse walk into the darkness. He understood now why Sidonie

was afraid of Keldson. Surely she didn't intend to marry him. Cole couldn't think, at the moment, of anything worse that could happen to a girl like her.

He let his mind go back over the weeks to the little Arizona town of San Ramon, to Andy Carew who lay dying with a dry gulcher's bullet in his back, Andy Carew who had been the best friend Cole Knapp ever had. He would never forget those last whispered words, "See about Sidonie, Cole. If she needs any help, give it to her." She needed help. He was sure of that, but he wasn't sure how or when to give it to her. Time, he thought, would give him the answer. That was his one hope.

COLE camped for the night along the creek below the mesa, and rode into the town of Cedar early. Looking up, Cole could see the house from the valley, an elaborate structure as out of place as a knife fight in a drawing room.

Had it been designed entirely to Zelda Carew's whims? Or had it satisfied something within Bill Carew himself? Cole didn't know. But he did know about Anchor with Marty Keldson ramrodding it. He wouldn't be satisfied with what Carew had gained. He was a man who would have to prove himself before Sidonie and the country, and before himself. Yes, Keldson was a driver who obeyed no rules of the road. He'd be constantly adding to Anchor, and he'd never surrender an inch.

Under the probing rays of the morning sun, the town of Cedar was revealed as a straggling, unplanned community. Even the bold facade of false fronts failed to add a note of dignity, for almost all the houses and buiness establishments needed paint. Weeds had grown tall in vacant lots, and all kinds of litter clung to the fences and along the edge of the boardwalks, even tumbleweeds uprooted by the winds of winter and fall. Only one thing distinguished this town from the dozens of other isolated cowtowns Cole had seen, a complete lack of pride and dignity.

Cole reined into the open doors of the livery barn, and stepped down, grateful for shade and coolness after the burning rays of the sun.

A man stepped out of a tackroom and office and came toward Cole. He wore a tarnished star on his vest, which was limp and shiny with grease and dirt. In Cole's eyes he personified the town. He was slack-lipped and walked with his shoulders bent, moving slowly as though nothing in his life was worth hurrying for.

The stableman nodded, his curious eyes moving from rider to horse and back to rider. He said, "Looks like you've come a ways."

Cole nodded. "A far piece. Give the horse a double bait of oats and rub him down."

The man stepped forward and took the reins. Cole held out his hand. "My name's Knapp. Cole Knapp."

"I'm Rhodes. Dusty Rhodes." The man's laugh was a high cackle.

"You the sheriff?"

"Nope. This ain't the county seat." He motioned eastward. "County seat's over yonder. I'm town marshal and deputy sheriff. Not that the town needs one. Nothing ever happens in Cedar, Mr. Knapp. Real quiet little town."

"Things will start happening now," Cole said. "How's the hotel?"

Rhodes eyed him uncertainly, puzzling over his first remark. Then he shrugged and said, "Hotel's fine for bed bugs."

"Is there someone who takes in boarders in town?" Cole asked.

"Can't think of nobody." Rhodes' eyes brightened. "There is Mrs. Bud Davis. They owned a ranch about five miles up the creek, but her husband got killed six, seven months ago, so she moved to town. She's havin' a hard time of it. Got no relatives but her father-in-law. That's Ben Davis. He skids cedars off'n the hills and saws 'em up for firewood. Got a steam-powered saw, he has, but don't make much with it." Rhodes swiped at a fly that settled on his nose. "She could use the money, but I doubt she'd take you. She's expectin'."

"Where does she live?"

RHODES shrugged. "Won't hurt to ask, I reckon." His tone said he thought it a waste of time, but he gave the directions. "Cross the bridge and turn right. First house you come to. Can't miss it."

Cole walked toward the street, his warsack

balanced easily on one of his powerful shoulders. He paused in the archway, but did not back up. A band of riders was coming in from the north at a dead run.

Marty Keldson led them, astride a powerful blue roan. A small man on a buckskin horse rode beside Keldson. Cole counted ten men in the party and guessed it was the whole Anchor crew coming in for a morning on the town. They hauled up in a cloud of dust across the street at the Staghorn's hitch-rail.

The little man who had ridden with Keldson let out a whoop, drew his gun and fired at the elkhorns above the door. Cole heard Keldson's heavy voice, "Put it up, damn it."

Cole noticed that, with the exception of Keldson, the little man was the only one of Anchor's riders who carried a gun. Cole considered that. On some men a gun looked as out of place as two left legs. On others it seemed as much a part of them as their hands. So it was with this one. The gun was holstered low on his right thigh and tied with a thong to his leg. The holster was cut away so that the whole trigger guard was exposed.

Keldson recognized Cole, and even at this distance, Cole could see him stiffen with anger. Deliberately Cole left the livery stable and walked across the bridge. Behind him he heard Keldson talking to the gunslinger in words which were not distinguishable but which were plainly angry.

Cole paused on the bridge and stared back. Keldson met his stare insolently, but with anger, too. Then he turned to the small man and the pair went into the saloon.

Cole followed a side road that turned right from the bridge. The Davis house lay just beyond, its back yard reaching to the creek. Cole noted that the house was freshly painted, the only one he'd seen in town that was.

He expected, therefore, that Mrs. Davis would be equally neat, and he was not disappointed. She opened the door and nodded.

He hesitated, realizing that he should not have come. She stood clutching the door casing, awkward and heavy with the weight of her child. Cole murmured apologetically, "I was looking for a place to stay. Rhodes in the livery stable said you might be willing. . . ." He stopped, not quite knowing how to say what he had in mind.

Mrs. Davis was a plain woman in her early twenties, but now she smiled, and her face, bright with humor and friendliness, was suddenly not plain at all. "I understand what you're trying to say, Mr. —"

"Knapp. Cole Knapp."

"I'd like to rent you a room, Mr. Knapp. It's clean and the bed is comfortable. I'll give you your meals, too, if you want them."

Still Cole hesitated, thinking the extra burden of work was unfair. The smile left her face and was replaced by anxiety that was almost pitiful. "Won't you just look at the room before you leave? Don't let my condition worry you. I'm very well, and quite strong. I'll look after you and mend and wash your clothes. . . ."

Cole said, "I'll look at it," and followed her into the house.

The room she showed him opened into the parlor, and was clean as she had promised. Cole dropped his war sack in a corner. When he turned to her, he found her watching him with an intensity that was almost painful. She said, still meeting his eyes bravely, "I need the money, Mr. Knapp. Every little bit helps."

"I'll stay," he said, "but if the time comes when you can't—"

"I'll tell you when it does, Mr. Knapp," she broke in. "It's a promise."

Cole smiled and handed her a gold eagle. "When that's used up, I'll pay more. It's just that I don't know how long I'll be in town."

"Thank you. And Mr. Knapp?"

"Yes?"

"I'll have dinner for you at twelve."

Cole smiled again, liking her and oddly concerned about her. He wondered how her husband had died. One of life's inexplicable tragedies, he thought as he left the house.

He crossed the bridge again and angled across the intersection to the Staghorn, an unaccustomed tension suddenly upon him.

AS HE walked to the bar, he saw Marty Keldson standing beside the skinny gunman near the center of the bar. The rest of Anchor's crew was scattered about the big room, most of them playing poker in the rear. Dick Walters stood at the far end

of the bar, staring moodily into his beer glass, Cole recognized the man beside him as one of the three who had pursued Sidonie Carew the night before.

The bartender moved toward Cole, wiping the mahogany surface with a towel. Cole said, "Beer."

He was sure Keldson and Walters had seen him come in, but for the present both chose to ignore him. So Cole deliberately opened the game, saying to the bartender in a clear voice that would carry to Walters, "It's funny about this country. I've been asking for Andy Carew ever since I showed up here, but I can't find out anything about him. He grew up here, so it looks like somebody's hiding something. Or maybe everyone wants to forget there ever was an Andy Carew."

Without looking down the bar, Cole sensed that Keldson had stiffened, that Walters and his companion were moving back from the bar and edging toward the door. Keldson walked slowly toward Cole, and when Cole swung to face him, he saw that the great, square face was livid, the eyes as vicious as those of a tormented rattler.

"So you didn't listen," Keldson said. "And you didn't ride."

"I listened all right," Cole said. "I just didn't ride."

The gunman moved back until he stood in the middle of the room. Cole swung a little so he could watch both of them. He was close enough to the gunman to see that his eyes were pale blue, that they glittered now with a frosty eagerness. Cole's first estimate of the little man had not been wrong. This was a killer who killed no more for money than for the pleasure the killing gave him.

Chairs scraped back beside the window and poker chips cascaded to the floor from a tipped table. Turning his head, Cole saw four Anchor punchers moving toward him. So he was boxed on three sides, by the punchers, by the gunman, by Keldson.

The bar at his back was the fourth side of the box. Suddenly Cole felt a sawed-off double barrel prodding him in the side.

Eagerness crept into Keldson's eyes, the wicked eagerness of a man who likes to hurt and cripple.

Keldson motioned toward the gunman. "Let him try for his gun, Le Clair. Let him try if he wants to. But if he does, kill him."

The bartender pushed the shotgun deeper into Cole's ribs, as though by way of warning. And Cole's mind was racing. Le Clair! Duke Le Clair! So that was who the gunman was. Cole had heard of him.

Chuckling deep in his chest, Keldson moved slowly and confidently toward Cole, the whisky bottle raised in his right hand.

When Keldson was close enough, he nodded at the bartender. He said, "All right, Sam," and the shotgun was withdrawn. Then, while Cole watched Keldson warily, the shotgun muzzle swung, striking him squarely on the bridge of the nose.

The blow was a savage one, bringing a spurt of blood from Cole's nose. Tears sprang to his eyes. Free of the shotgun's threat, he dropped to the floor, snatching for his gun. Keldson, however, anticipated Cole's move. His boot came out and caught Cole squarely in the face.

Cole fell in the sawdust flat on his back. Keldson spoke to one of his men, "All right, get him."

Cole rolled to get his hands and knees under him and to protect his belly. A boot collided with his head, and hands seized both of his arms. Struggling wildly, he was dragged to his feet. He felt his gun lifted from its holster and heard it thump solidly on the bar top.

Keldson said, "Hold him. I'm going to make him wish he'd taken my advice and drifted."

Cole fought like a wild man, throwing his head back against the face of the puncher behind him, twisting and plunging and trying to break free, kicking at Keldson who stood in front of him and missing by a good two feet.

THERE were too many of them. One of Anchor's punchers had an arm around his throat. Two others held him by the arms, twisting them savagely until they threatened to break. Sweating, Cole relaxed.

Keldson grinned and stood still, his only movement that of his heaving chest. Turning, he grabbed the soggy bar towel from where it had been dropped on the mahogany. He

tore it in two and began to wind one half carefully around his right hand. When he had finished, he wound the other half around his left. He took his time, the grin never leaving his face.

Cole glanced at Le Clair. The gunman was watching, but there was an expression of distaste on his face. Contempt, too, when he looked at Marty Keldson. Duke Le Clair was a Texas gunfighter, a killer. Yet he had his own tight code of ethics, a carryover from the Southern chivalry that had seeped west from the gulf and border states. A man fought with a gun but not with his fists because it was degrading. He never fought an enemy held by others and entirely helpless.

Le Clair turned to leave, but stopped at Keldson's order. "You stay here, Duke. You stay. I want you to see this."

Then he swung, swiftly and brutally, the towel-wrapped fist smashing Cole's lips against his teeth. His left came out, landing in Cole's stomach just below his ribs. Pain exploded from the area like the concussion waves of a charge of dynamite. Cole's head reeled, and then was snapped back by a second right from the grunting Keldson.

Cole fixed his eyes on the man. There was no fear in them, or even dread. But they showed Cole's hate. They showed Keldson a hate so virulent that he stopped momentarily.

Then a roar broke from Keldson's throat. The toweled fists came out again, smashing, cutting, closing the eyes that had stared so defiantly. They smashed his nose and mouth. They drove him to the very brink of unconsciousness, and still they came, smashing, cutting, as if Keldson were trying to smash his conscience instead of another man's face.

Cole heard someone shout, "That's enough! Damn you, Marty, I said that was enough!"

The beating stopped. Someone shoved Cole back against the bar and held him there. Another man held a beer glass half-filled with whisky to his battered mouth, and poured the contents into it.

The whisky was like fire on his smashed lips, like fire in his mouth. He swallowed, and choked, and swallowed again. Then he put his hands against the bar behind him and supported himself, somehow finding enough strength in his rubbery knees to support his weight. From half-closed eyes he glared at the men circling him.

Cole recognized the three who had held him, and the fourth who had remained aloof. He saw Duke Le Clair's shamed and angry face. He saw Keldson, sweating, his barrel chest heaving like a bellows, and he heard his ragged, hoarse breathing. Then Cole saw another man with a star on his chest. Dusty Rhodes, liveryman, part time marshal and deputy sheriff.

Rhodes asked breathlessly, "What's the trouble here?"

"Damned trouble maker, this drifter," Keldson panted. "Lock him up, Dusty. When he can stand, we'll ride him out of town on a rail."

"Who started the fight?"

"He did." Keldson looked around belligerently at his men. None of them disputed his word. Even Dick Walters went out the door without voicing a protest.

Rhodes turned to the bartender. "That right, Sam?"

SAM must have nodded, although Cole couldn't see him. Rhodes moved over and took his arm. "No use asking you. You'd say Keldson started it, wouldn't you?"

Cole made a grin, though it hurt his mouth to do it. He said bitterly, "Your mind's made up, ain't it, marshal? You take your orders from Anchor, so you better do what the big man says."

Rhodes flushed. "Come along. You'll get twenty-four hours in jail and the judge'll give you a ten dollar fine for disturbing the peace. After that you can drift."

"I can, but I won't."

"Don't crowd me, son. Don't crowd me. Just come along."

Cole shrugged wearily. The prospect of twenty-four hours of quiet and lying on a bunk, even a hard one, was suddenly appealing. But before he went, he looked at Keldson. He said, "You think about this, mister, because I'm going to be thinking about it."

Then he was walking beside the marshal, through the deep sawdust of the saloon and out into the bright, painful sunlight. He found it hard to think, but there was something back there in the saloon that was queer.

Then he remembered. Silence when he left, not the babble of voices which usually follows a fight. He thought with some satisfaction, Keldson lost more today than I did. He lost the respect of his men.

The thought did not give him as much consolation as it should have. He realized that the only thing that could fully satisfy him was Keldson's death.

"Here," Rhodes said. Opening a thick wooden door, he motioned for Cole to go into the building.

It was a small office with a desk and two chairs and a gun rack on the wall. The air was cool, the light thin, and a moment passed before he saw Dick Walters sitting in a third chair in the corner.

"What do you want?" Rhodes asked roughly.

"I've got something to tell you," Walters said. "I didn't want to say it back there in the saloon."

"Why not?" Rhodes demanded. "I was asking questions."

"You know why. Same reason you and Judge Benson and a lot of people around here don't do what they're supposed to."

"All right," Rhodes said. "What is it?"

"I was in the Staghorn when this fellow shows up asking for Andy Carew. He didn't start that ruckus. Keldson did. Sam shoved a shotgun at him." He motioned to Cole. "Then Keldson moved in and had three of his boys hold him. He didn't have no chance, Dusty."

Rhodes moved past Cole and opened a metal door. "In here, Knapp."

"Ain't you gonna do anything?" Walters demanded. "You can't hold him for disturbing the peace when he didn't—"

"I am holding him," Rhodes said, "and the charge is disturbing the peace."

Cole stumbled through the door and along the corridor and into the empty cell Rhodes indicated. He sprawled on the nearest bunk. He heard the barred door slammed shut, then Walters' dogged voice through the metal grill, "You've got to take a stand somewhere, Dusty. I told you—"

"I heard it and I'll tell Judge Benson when Knapp comes up for trial," Rhodes said. "Now you go play with your Regulators."

He dropped back on the mattress and closed his eyes. Sidonie Carew had been right about Dick Walters. He wasn't as tough as he'd wanted Cole to think last night at the stone cabin.

Well, he could forget Walters. But not Marty Keldson. He'd ridden here to kill a man. Now he found himself hoping Keldson was that man. And he thought he was.

COLE was roused from his pain-induced stupor by the sound of the cell door clanging shut. He opened one of his blackened eyes and stared upward from the filthy bunk on which he lay.

Anger stirred in him as he heard Rhodes' voice, "You got a visitor, Knapp." After that the man's boot heels receded along the corridor, and the metal door slammed shut.

The man held a black derby in his hand as if he were making a social call. He was tall, and slightly stooped with age. His eyes were sharp and intelligent, but not sympathetic. Rather they were the eyes you sometimes saw in a banker, Cole thought, calculating eyes that had encountered the worst in humans so often they had gradually come to expect it.

"I'm Judge Benson," the man said.

"Well?" Cole's voice was frankly hostile.

"If you're sensible, you can get out of here in two minutes."

Cole sat up, bracing himself by putting both hands palm-down against the bunk. He waited a moment until the walls of the cell quit turning, then he said, "What do you mean by being sensible? Leaving the country, maybe?"

Benson flushed, his eyes on the window above Cole's head. "To put it bluntly, yes. Andy Carew is gone. He's been gone nine years. He was probably killed in a brawl somewhere. Besides, the Carews are suspicious of you."

"You mean Keldson, don't you?"

"I'm including him. I don't blame him, either. What do you expect? You're a drifter, a saddle bum. You ride into a country that's getting along and you start asking about a man who, if he were here and alive would stand to inherit half of the richest spread in the country. What is your game, Knapp?" Benson's eyes were pinned on Cole's face now.

When Cole didn't answer, Benson went on, "I hear you told Dick Walters you were going to kill a man. Who, Knapp? And why?"

"Nobody until I get out of here. You can't hold me forever on a charge of disturbing the peace and you know it."

"Then you won't leave the country?"

"No."

Benson's lips tightened. "You give me no choice, Knapp. I'll hold you under $500 bail until I'm able to schedule your trial."

Cole grinned. "And I suppose that'll be six months from now."

"At least that. Perhaps a year." Benson's anger had been increasing until now he acted as if he couldn't remain here in the cell with Cole for another minute. He rapped on the cell bars with his gold-headed cane. "Rhodes. Get me out of here."

Rhodes shrugged. After he had left Cole lay back on the bunk. He was angry now, a slow, deep anger that had its roots in injustice and helplessness.

He got up and strode to the window, ignoring his aching body and refusing to favor his injuries. Scowling, he stared into the street. As he stood there, a buggy pulled up, and Sidonie stepped down, heading toward the jail door.

Cole heard her voice, the words indistinguishable, but oddly comforting to his ears. He heard Rhodes answer, then both of them crossed the office to the metal door. Rhodes unlocked it, calling, "You're bailed out, Knapp."

Cole looked at the girl as she came along the corridor. "Whose idea is this? And what are the conditions?"

"It's my idea," she said spiritedly, "and there are no conditions. I'm simply repaying you for helping me last night."

"Suppose I skip bail?"

"I wish you would," she said. "I only wish you would. I don't know why you're here, but you must have proved to yourself by now that you'll only cause more trouble if you stay. No, don't worry about the bail, Mr. Knapp. Anchor can afford to lose it, but I'm not sure Anchor can afford to have you stay."

"I won't skip bail, Miss Carew."

SHE LOOKED directly at him. Suddenly she seemed to become aware of the pain that was in him. Her eyes softened as she said, "Come on. We'll stop by and see Doc Holt. If he's sober, he can patch you up."

Rhodes unlocked the cell door. Sidonie led the way out and Cole followed.

Once outside, Sidonie took his arm, saying, "Upstairs over the bank. We'll see if Doc's in his office."

They climbed an outside stairway. Sidonie opened a door at the top, and they went through it and along a hall to an office in the back. At the far side of the room a man lay on a leather-covered couch, snoring loudly.

Sidonie crossed the room and shook him vigorously. "Doc! Wake up! It's Sidonie Carew."

He sat bolt upright, and stared at them out of bloodshot eyes. "Whattaya want?"

Cole pushed Sidonie aside. He said, "I need some patching, Doc."

"Who're you?" Doc reached a pudgy hand to the desk and found a thick-lensed pair of glasses. "Go wash your face. Them cuts will heal without no help from me. Go away." He opened a desk drawer, found a bottle of whisky and drank deeply without choking and without grimacing.

Cole looked at Sidonie. "He'd do more harm than good. Let's leave him alone."

She nodded agreement and led the way out of the office and along the hall and down the stairs. As he left the room, Cole heard the couch creak beneath Doc's bulk and an instant later there was the sound of snoring.

When they reached the street, Cole asked, "What do folks around here do when someone really needs him?"

"They sober him up," Sidonie answered. "Cold water and black coffee." She looked directly at him. "What are you going to do now?"

He stared across the street at the Staghorn. The Anchor horses were gone. He asked, "What happened to your bully boys?"

She flushed. "They went back to Anchor. They're branding late calves on Triangle Mesa. I asked what you were going to do?"

"I've got a room at Mrs. Davis'. Maybe she'll fix me a hot bath."

"I'll walk with you," she said.

Together they crossed the street and headed toward the bridge. When they reached the Davis house, Sidonie knocked. Mrs. Davis opened the door, her face showing concern the instant she looked at Cole's face. "Come in, Mr. Knapp. I'll get some things and patch you up."

Cole went in but Sidonie did not follow. Instead, she said, "You don't need me now. Good-by."

Cole said, "Thank you for getting me out of the calaboose. You won't be sorry. I'm not here to hurt you."

"But you are here to hurt somebody, and, I suppose, to help yourself." She paused, studying him. "Zelda has a theory about you. She believes Andy lost his share of Anchor to you in a poker game. Are you hoping to cash in? You won't, Mr. Knapp. You won't as long as I'm here to stop you."

"And Keldson?"

"He'll stop you if I can't, in a much more unpleasant way. Good day, Mr. Knapp."

She whirled and stalked down the path to the street. He shut the door and turned. Mrs. Davis stood in the kitchen doorway. "I had a boiler of water on the stove and I thought you'd like a hot bath. Afterward you can go to bed, and I'll get busy washing your clothes." Beyond her on the kitchen floor he saw a steaming tub in front of the stove. "There's an old bathrobe on a chair. Take your time. When you get done, put the robe on and leave your clothes on the floor."

"You're very kind," he said.

"No, Mr. Knapp. I'm not kind at all. It's just that I know who did this to you. I don't know why, but that's not important. He's the only man around here capable of a thing like that. You see, he beat my husband the same way about six months ago, only my husband died. I hate Keldson, Mr. Knapp, even more than you do. Now go along. I'll patch you up when you're finished."

She closed the door. Cole undressed and crawled into the tub. He wondered what her father-in-law was like, and whether he hated Keldson too. Suddenly he realized how lucky he was to have found this place. After what had happened, probably no one else would have given him a room.

AFTER leaving the Davis house, Sidonie Carew walked quickly back across the bridge, and along the street until she reached her buggy in front of the jail. Her walk was decisive, her back very straight. She was oddly irritated, and could not understand why.

Keldson, she knew, would not be pleased when he heard she had posted Cole Knapp's bail. Nor was she particularly pleased with herself for doing so. In her direct way, she examined her own irritation and displeasure, and questioned herself as to its cause.

Knapp, she decided, made an unforgettable impact upon everyone he met. Admittedly, he had come to Cedar for the purpose of killing a man. But why? Why indeed, unless he had known Andy Carew and hoped to get for himself Andy's share of the Anchor ranch.

Before she was halfway to Anchor, Sidonie reached the reluctant conclusion that she had made a mistake in bailing Cole out. And yet, a part of her was glad. There had been no reason for Marty to beat him the way he had. And she had to admit she was drawn to Cole Knapp in a way she had never been drawn to another man.

She looked out across the valley, green with growing hay. A small part of it belonged to her, but the bulk of Anchor's hay meadows lay north of Triangle Mesa along Coroner Creek. Her father had tried to gain possession of the valley of the Big Horse just as he had expanded along Coroner Creek until he'd finally owned all of it, but here he had not succeeded, largely because of the effective leadership of young Bud Davis, who Zelda and Marty claimed was an outlaw.

Her father was dead and Davis had been murdered. Now, even though she nominally owned Anchor, too many important decisions were being made by Marty Keldson, and Marty was a predatory wolf whose ambitions were endless. This was something she simply could not understand. She was satisfied with Anchor exactly as it was, but her father had never been satisfied. Marty was worse, and so was Zelda.

She found Zelda at the ranch curled up like a kitten in her private parlor in the back of the house. "Zelda, what do you think of Cole Knapp?" Sidonie asked.

"He's uncouth, to say the least," Zelda said. "And he's been a worry to me from the moment he asked about Andy."

"Why?"

"Because he'll make trouble for us."

"How can he make trouble for Anchor?"

Zelda hesitated, then said, "I told you this morning. I think he cheated Andy out of his share in a poker game. He probably got it down in writing and then killed Andy."

Zelda picked up a book. Watching her, Sidonie thought there was more in her mind than she had said. She was afraid of something. From years of living with her, Sidonie knew that Zelda had little concern for anything or anyone except Marty.

Many times Zelda had bent Bill Carew to her will because of Marty. When Andy had left, Sidonie had been too young to know what was happening, but now the thought occurred to her that Marty and Zelda's ambitions for him might have been responsible for Andy's leaving.

"Did you know Marty gave Cole Knapp a beating and had him thrown into jail?" Sidonie asked.

Zelda looked up from her book. "No, but it's not surprising. It's why I warned Knapp to leave the country. I know Marty. I know how he gets when he's crossed."

"Do you know what he'll do if Knapp stays?"

"Yes," Zelda said calmly. "Marty will kill him."

"The way Bud Davis was killed?"

"Perhaps, but you mustn't be too hard on Marty. He's like your father, Sidonie. You and Anchor are his life. He'll do anything to protect you or the ranch."

For a moment Sidonie stared at Zelda, shocked by the utter lack of emotion in Zelda's voice. Abruptly she got up and strode from the room. She went upstairs and changed to her riding skirt and blouse. She came downstairs again and went out through the front door. Her mare stood saddled beside the barn, nuzzling spilled grain upon the ground.

SHE MOUNTED and rode out of the yard, and for a few moments let the mare run free, as though the rushing air could blow the troubled thoughts from her mind. When the mare slowed, Sidonie made no effort to guide the animal, but let her pick her own way across the mesa.

She knew that Marty and his Anchor crew were out gathering stragglers, branding late calves and those that had escaped branding during spring roundup. She came upon them unexpectedly as she rode over a long rise.

Suddenly Keldson looked up from below, saw her, and loped his horse up the slope toward her. Reaching her, Keldson's voice was rough. "What're you doing here, Sid?"

The tone irritated her as it always did when he used it on her. She said, "Anchor's mine. I'll go where I please."

"Not after—" He stopped, a suggestion of embarrassment sweeping over his heavy, square face.

Sidonie finished, "After we're married? You're jumping to conclusions, Marty. I haven't said I'd marry you."

He looked at her helplessly, still scowling. "What do you want from a man, Sid? You know I'll look after you. I'll protect you and everything that belongs to you. Is it pretty words you want? Courtin'? I ain't much of a hand at them things. You know how I feel, though. You know."

"Do I?" she asked sweetly, hating herself for her deliberate sweetness. "How could I know? You never told me."

He had a soft side. On rare occasions he had shown it to her, and many times she had seen it when he was with his mother. But he seemed to be ashamed of it, and it was the other side he was proud of, his brutality, his ruthlessness, the driving way he had of getting things done. Now he seemed caught in the confusion she had aroused in him.

"All right," he said helplessly. "I'll tell you. I—"

"Never mind," Sidonie said sharply. "There's something else I wanted to talk to you about. You beat Cole Knapp and had him thrown into jail. Why?"

"You know why," Keldson said. "He's a troublemaker. He asked for what he got."

Sidonie said, "I just wanted you to know. The Judge held him for $500 bail. I put up the bail. He's free."

Keldson's face was like a thundercloud. "Why the hell—"

Sidonie's voice was soft, but it was penetrating and steady. "I did it to show you something, Marty. You can run Anchor, at least as long as Dad's will lets Zelda control it, but you aren't going to decide its policy. What you did today reflects on Anchor, and it's got to stop. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yeah, clear as crystal. I'll tell you why you bailed that drifter out if you don't know yourself. You're in love with him."

Sidonie stared at him, shocked. She felt her face flush, then suddenly she could not meet Keldson's contemptuous gaze. She said coldly, "You're Zelda's son, so you have some rights on Anchor. But don't overstep them. Don't overstep them again."

She forced herself to meet his gaze. She saw something in his eyes, something half-hidden. It made her afraid, and cold inside. Angrily she whirled the mare and sat the spurs in her sides. She rode away at a hard run and did not look back.

COLE slept the clock around, occasionally moaning in his sleep. In full daylight he came awake suddenly, startled and uneasy as his opening eyes fell upon unfamiliar surroundings. Then he heard dishes rattle in the kitchen, smelled coffee and frying bacon, and relaxed as he remembered where he was.

He threw back the blanket and sat up. His head reeled and the room swam in front of him, but he had his feet on the floor now and would not give up.

A vast impatience was within him. Sitting here on the edge of the bed nursing his aches and pains would accomplish nothing. He stood up and grabbed the brass knob atop one of the bedposts until the waves of nausea passed. When he could, he shook his head in disgust, for he knew that today would be lost.

Irritation grew in him as he looked around for his clothes and failed to find them. He released his hold on the bedpost and crossed the room, the exertion bringing a fine film of sweat to his face. He opened the door a crack and called, "Mrs. Davis, what did you do with my clothes?"

"I'll bring them right away, Mr. Knapp." Her voice was pleasant, cheerful, and good to hear. In a lower tone she said, "Watch the bacon, Dad. Don't let it burn, you hear?" Then her steps came through the kitchen door and across the parlor. She said, "Get back into bed, Mr. Knapp."

Stubbornly he put his hand through the crack in the door. "Just give me my clothes."

"No, I'm coming in," she said firmly. "You're a badly beaten man, Mr. Knapp. If you stay in this community, you need to get well, and quickly. Are you going to stay?"

"I'll stay, all right."

"Then don't leave this house until you feel like fighting because that's probably what you'll have to do." She stood on the other side of the door, waiting. "I have some liniment and I want to rub you with it several times today. If you're like my husband was, the soreness won't be gone for quite a while."

She sounded like a determined woman, and Cole knew the quickest way to get his clothes and breakfast was to let her do as she wished. He closed the door, and returning to the bed, pulled the blanket up to his neck. He called, "All right."

She came in and laid his clothes, carefully folded, on the foot of the bed, then moved around to the side and set the bottle of liniment on the stand. "Your clothes are washed and ironed," she said impersonally. "I darned your socks and sewed up the rip down the back of your shirt, but I'm afraid it will tear again when you put it on."

"I'll buy some new clothes today."

"Not today and probably not tomorrow." She folded the blanket back to his waist. He clutched at it and tried to pull it back, but she stopped him with her words, "I am not a girl, Mr. Knapp. Just look at yourself. You're a solid, purple bruise from your waist to your neck."

She poured liniment into a cupped palm and began to rub, first his chest, then his shoulders and arms, and finally his stomach and ribs. Her strong hands moved in a circular pattern, leaving a warm glow wherever they worked. When she finished, she said, "Turn over. I'll do your back."

He obeyed, his irritation gone. She knew what she was doing, and he seemed to heal under her hands. He relaxed, closing his eyes and surrendering at last to this unexpected but welcome luxury.

"Why are you doing this?" he asked.

"I'd do anything in the world to save your life. And it wouldn't be worth a cent, if you met Marty in the shape you're in now."

She stepped back and corked the liniment bottle. She wiped her hands on her apron, and took a small jar from its pocket. "Put some of this salve on your face. Breakfast will be ready in five minutes."

She left the room, closing the door behind her. Cole daubed salve gingerly on his face where Keldson's fists had bruised and battered it.

HE DRESSED, pleasantly aware of the lessened pain in his body, and thinking it had been a long time since his clothes had been clean. He'd been on the trail almost a month, with time for nothing but eating, sleeping, and riding. Now that he was here, the prodding sense of urgency was gone. He'd built a fire under Keldson and he could afford to wait. His immediate problem was to stay alive.

When he went into the kitchen, Mrs. Davis was frying eggs at the stove. A little man at the table got up, and as he held out his hand, Cole noticed that all the fingers were missing save for the index finger and thumb. He gripped the hand, finding the palm hard with callouses.

The little man said, "I'm Ben Davis, Janet's father-in-law." He grinned in a friendly way as Cole sat down. "Like to see you tangle with Keldson sometime when you've got both arms free. Might be a different story."

"You'll see it," Cole said.

He instinctively liked Davis. The little man couldn't weigh more than one hundred and fifteen pounds soaking wet, but size, as far as Cole was concerned, was not a measure of a man's worth. Ben Davis had a look of toughness about him, like a dry spruce knot. Anyone who tangled with him, Cole thought, would find they'd tied into a buzz saw.

Davis eyed Cole with equal interest. He said, "Sure admire a man with guts enough to tackle Keldson. Don't know what you've got agin him, but just bein' agin him puts me on your side."

Cole grinned, the pain of his split lips making him grimace. He said, "Judging from what happened yesterday, looks like I needed someone on my side."

Davis said, "Stay alive and you'll have more friends. Take my word for it. Time's the answer to everything around here. Just give Keldson's cussedness time to pile up and he'll put everyone on your side—maybe even Sidonie, though I reckon that's askin' too much of Providence."

Davis began to eat hungrily eyeing Cole all the time. After a while he said, his curiosity showing in his eyes, "You've cut yourself a man-sized job, Knapp. Everybody knows you've been askin' around for Andy Carew. They know Keldson's hellbent on runnin' you out of the country. They're commencin' to wonder why."

"I can't tell you that," Cole said. "Not now."

"All right. Makes no difference to me. Reckon you've got your reasons. But there's a thing or two you ought to know. Everybody hereabouts but me and Janet are scared to death of Keldson, or else toadyin' to him because Anchor can do 'em good moneywise."

Janet broke in, "We're not brave, Mr. Knapp. We're afraid of Keldson, too. But Dad and I have reached the point where nothing is important any more except seeing justice done." She was silent a moment, her dark eyes troubled. Then she went on, "My husband and I had a small ranch about five miles from town on Big Horse Creek. Keldson beat my husband up just the way he did you and told him to leave the country. But Bud wasn't a man to run. Next time they caught him they killed him. They beat him so badly he died."

Angrily, Davis jabbed a fork in Cole's direction. "Same thing will happen to you next time if you ain't careful, a sight more careful than you was when you walked into that hornets' nest in the Staghorn."

Remembering Walters, Cole asked abruptly, "What about this bunch that calls themselves the Regulators?"

DAVIS was suddenly contemptuous. "Spit'n talk boys. Dick Walters heads 'em, now that Bud's gone, but Dick don't do nothin' but call meetin's and talk.

Give 'em a few more weeks an' they'll all sell out to Keldson, the whole kit and kaboodle of 'em."

"Bud was president of the Regulators when he was alive," Janet said. "They amounted to something then, and that's why Keldson killed him. Now there's nobody to fill Bud's boots. Nobody." Her voice, filled with contempt, was a tribute to her dead husband.

Davis said slyly, not looking at Cole, "Unless you do it."

Cole ignored the suggestion. He asked, "What's riding Keldson?"

"He's a damned land-hungry pirate, that's what." Davis pushed his chair back and tilted it. "You take the old days, when Andy was still around. Bill Carew was a hard-workin' jigger, and tougher'n a boot. But you couldn't help likin' him. He spread out, and he put the squeeze on anybody who got in his way, but he wasn't mean like Keldson. Change came, I reckon, when Andy's ma died. Bill married this Zelda woman, an' she wasn't no better'n she is now. Stage dancer, I hear, who didn't wear much more'n a smile when she danced. She fetched Marty, Marty bein' her boy. But Andy and Marty couldn't get along for love nor money, an' Zelda kept takin' Marty's side. Finally Andy pulled out, an' by the Lord Harry, I don't blame him."

"When Bill died," Janet said, "everybody expected Andy to show up. Judge Benson put a detective on his trail, but he never came back. Nobody knows whether the detective found him or not, but I guess he didn't. If he'd found Andy, or if Andy read in the papers about his father's death, he'd have come, wouldn't he?"

"You'd think so," Cole said. "What about Bill Carew?" he added. "I mean, after he married Zelda."

"He began to get mean, too," Davis said, "even toward Andy, his own kid. When Marty got older, Bill just let him do as he damned pleased. Even hired that gunslinger Le Clair on Marty's sayso. I reckon you seen Le Clair in the Staghorn."

Cole nodded, and Davis went on disgustedly, "They make a pair if I ever seen one. It's plain why folks don't fight too long."

"It's plain, all right," Cole said.

Davis finished and got up. "Well, sittin' here jawin' ain't earnin' the baby shoes." He looked at Janet with a tenderness that surprised Cole. His voice was determined, though Cole thought he detected a note of helplessness, almost desperation, in it. "That baby's goin' to have everything he needs."

Janet smiled. "I'm not worried, Dad."

Davis picked up a pair of pitch-covered gloves and a hat liberally sprinkled with sawdust. "I'm worried, if you ain't." He turned his gaze to Cole. "I make my livin' sellin' firewood. Got a steam-powered saw and a couple of teams to skid cedar off the mill. Trouble is, I need a man to help and can't get one. Keldson's passed the word, and when that happens, nobody will touch you."

He bobbed his head at Janet and went out through the back door. Then he turned and stuck it back through again, grinning. "Do what Janet says, hear?"

Janet brought the coffee pot from the stove and refilled Cole's cup. She said, "I knew he'd been worrying, although he hasn't said so before. Folks aren't buying wood from him like they used to. Dad keeps hauling and sawing, but it just piles up in his wood yard. That's part of what he meant by saying Keldson had passed the word." Her eyes were troubled. "Keldson is a mad dog, Mr. Knapp. You've seen Dusty Rhodes, so you know what the law is. But I think Dad's wrong when he says Keldson is land-hungry. It's more than that."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure." She turned to the stove, moistened a finger and touched one of the bricks. "These are hot now. Go back to bed. I'll wrap them and bring them to you."

He finished his coffee and rose. "I can't stay here, Mrs. Davis."

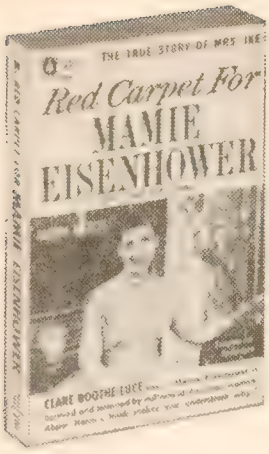
She turned to him, anxiety shadowing her face. "Wasn't the bed comfortable?"

"I didn't mean that. But I'll bring more trouble down on you if I stay."

"We need the money, Mr. Knapp. Every cent we can get." Her flushed face told him how hard it was for her to say the words. "As for trouble, there is nothing Keldson can do to us now. I—I wish you'd stay."

"All right," he said gently. "If you want me to stay, I will."

*(To be continued in the next issue)*




enjoy this new
**POPULAR LIBRARY**
bestseller–

# Red Carpet For
# MAMIE EISENHOWER

by Alden Hatch

Read the heart-warming story
of America's First Lady.
Told by an intimate friend of
the President and Mrs. Eisenhower.

Now available as a
**POPULAR LIBRARY** pocketbook.
*Buy it at your newsstand today!*

on sale now— *Auntie Mame*
**by Patrick Dennis**

*Smash Bestseller for more than 80 weeks at $3.50!*
*Buy the* **POPULAR LIBRARY** *pocketbook edition*
*at your favorite newsstand today!*

205PR

# Heart of a LAWMAN

By ART KERCHEVAL

THE stranger who rode into snow-swept Challenge Hill had that air of studied aloofness. Wariness was there, too, in the subtle roving of the eyes, the gloveless gun hand not quite relaxed. The heavy sheepskin he wore was unbuttoned and flapping, the better to get at that gun. Brent Calhoun, halting in his rounds, watched the man slide from his grulla and enter the Golden Mare Saloon.

Calhoun strode on, along the whitening boardwalk, his head bent slightly against the thickening flurries. He cursed himself again and cursed the jobs he had to do. He wanted to rip off his marshal's star and tell them where to put it. The reason was that the stranger was no stranger to Brent Calhoun. The man had come here to meet him, with his guns set for action. Once more Calhoun would grow chill and sick over a hated killing, even if official.

He crossed Main Street, fast becoming blanketed with snow, and came to his office. The day's work was done, and Night Marshal Ford Newberry would take over. Soon Calhoun would be trudging up the hill toward his little cottage on the south edge of town. Then Nita would suddenly be in his arms, and he would know that life was worth living. Right now, Nita was his biggest worry because the newcomer had arrived to complicate things.

He entered the office, stomping his boots and slapping the snow off with his Stetson. Ford Newberry, a big, florid-faced ex-cowboy, brought his feet down from the scarred desk with a thud.

"Nice weather for Eskimos," Newberry said with a grin. "But who wants to be an Eskimo? It will be a cold one tonight."

Calhoun grunted. "Any man going out in this must have important business. Either that or something heavy's on his mind."

Newberry looked at him. "Spit it out," he urged. "You're leading to something."

"Clint Ferrand!" Calhound took a turn around the room. "Ferrand's hit town."

"And who's Clint Ferrand?"

Calhoun swung toward him. "He's just about as bad as they come. By now, I reckon he's wanted for everything in the books. He

*The badge he wore had forced Brent Calhoun to kill . . .*

started out with a running iron down on Checkerboard Flats in New Mexico and graduated to murder, stage stickups and bank jobs."

"Say," Newberry said, "you came from Checkerboard Flats, did you know him then?"

"I knew him." Calhoun said. "And I knew his brother, Monty. That's where the trouble all started."

"You never did tell me very much, Brent, what things were like in New Mexico."

"I'm going to tell you now," Calhoun said flatly. "I was born on the Flats. My dad owned a greasy-sack spread down there. I went to school with the Ferrand boys. Clint was the older and got the traveling itch after he finished the eighth grade. He wasn't far into his teens, when talk had it he was unloading blotch-branded cattle across the Line."

"What about Monty?" Newberry asked. He pulled out the makings.

"Monty and I were friends," Calhoun said, warmly. "We hunted and fished together, grew up together. He had some symptoms of a wild streak in him, though, and Clint

***but never before had it required him to kill a friend***

wasn't helping it any to keep it hobbled. If Clint had one strong attachment in this world, it was for his brother, and he'd planned for Monty to team up with him. He had plans for the two of them to make a fortune—fast."

The night marshal got his smoke glowing. "I'm beginning to see," he said, "why Clint Ferrand might mean trouble to you here in Challenge Hill."

"That's only part of the picture," Calhoun replied. "Clint's always blamed me for a breach between them. It took time, but I got Monty to live a straight life. When I left New Mexico, Monty was ranching his own little place, had a sweet little schoolteacher for a wife, and a baby boy that was just the image of him."

"You think there were other reasons," Newberry began, an ash dropping from his cigarette, unnoticed.

"There is only one big reason for Clint to be here, Ford. I guess you'd call it the false pride of the gunman. Once we tangled with our fists over Monty. I managed to make Clint go limping off. But he swore that someday, that somehow he'd get even. Now the time has come and it seems we'll meet with hot lead instead of knuckles. Now, at last, Clint figures he's fast enough with a gun to down Brent Calhoun."

"I get it." Newberry drummed his fingers on the desk. "You have a reputation now, Brent, from cleaning up this town. You've gotten very good with a gun, almost in the Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson class, in fact. Maybe Ferrand collects well-known marshals, like some people collect rare coins."

CALHOUN was silent about that, but he knew how right Newberry was. Clint was, among other evils, a glory grabber. Down in Arizona he'd beaten a marshal to the iron. Over in Kansas, he'd killed another whose gun-speed had had him all primed for an Abilene appointment. Somewhere—perhaps in a newspaper—Clint had learned that Calhoun was enforcing the sunrise-to-sunset peace in Challenge Hill, and he'd come here to renew an old acquaintance.

Sweeping a letter off the desk, he crumpled it angrily. Maybe he should have no compunctions about seeing Clint dead before his smoking gun, but he did have. He had no stomach for killing a man, in fact he never gotten to it. The ghosts of the past came to memory again, he could see clearly the men he had killed. Society said that shooting gunmen was a necessary task. But Calhoun kept remembering the blood spilling out of the Snake River Kid, Johnny Blackfoot, and Matt Elrod. It might not end, with Clint Ferrand. Monty might feel the need for revenge and ride across the border from New Mexico.

"Well," Calhound said and looked at the time. "Clock says it's time you took over, Ford. If you need help during the night, come a-running. You're lucky, I'd say, that you're not fast with a gun."

"Depends," Newberry said, "on how you look at it. Life gets kind of dull around here, when you have to sit back and let others take care of the gun fights."

"I'll wait for Clint's move," Calhoun said. "When he's ready, he'll come. He'll stay out of trouble, too, till then. Hell always busts out soon enough, without me butting into it with my handcuffs showing. Besides, I've got other worries."

"That's right." Newberry got to his feet, and adjusted his cartridge belt. "How is your wife?"

"She's getting her rest, and seems all right. But a man can't help worrying about those things."

"Sure, sure. As for me, I've never been married, but I can understand you worrying."

Calhoun went out then, pulling his hat low and his collar high. The wind-driven snow was coming down at a heavy slant. Cold and darkness closed in around him, as he started the walk up the hill. It was odd, he thought suddenly, that his job now consisted largely of footwork when most of his life had been spent in the saddle. Three times a day, he made his rounds of the town, quieting minor disturbances, settling disputes, checking trouble spots like the Golden Mare, Murphy's Black Jack Bar, and the Palace of Pleasure.

It was funny, too, how he got into this business. He'd been doing quite well as foreman of the Butcherknife outfit, and should have stuck with it. Jason Tharp was tight as old Scrooge himself, but he liked Calhoun and paid him ninety a month.

Besides, there was another inducement—Nita, old Jason's niece. Though she was eastern-bred she had lively interest in, what seemed to her the new and mystic West. She had arrived at the ranch for a summer vacation and had stayed. Calhoun was one of the reasons she had stayed, he mused happily, and they had married soon after.

He plowed his way up to the sharper rise and into the residential section. He cursed again the forces that had pushed him into wearing the star for Challenge Hill. A band of cow thieves, coming down out of the Miseries, had been tossing their wide loops on Butcherknife beef. They had gotten away with a hundred head, until Calhoun, backed by five of his best hands, had trailed them into a box canyon and wiped them out.

The upshot was that the town fathers of Challenge Hill blinked; exchanged glances; and summoned Brent Calhoun, the man who worked miracles with a six-shooter to them. Lawlessness was rampant in town, and they asked Calhoun to wear the badge and stamp out the lawlessness. Calhoun decided he would. After all, wasn't it a special job, paying higher than usual wages? A man that was planning a family had to look ahead, even if he took work he hated.

The lights of his cottage, shining dimly through the storm swirls, quickened his steps. In a few moments, he would be before his own log fire, Nita would help him forget the unpleasant thoughts of his work. Nita, with her flashing dark eyes, her eager smile. Yes, she was new to this country, but already she was taking hold, with a pioneer's fierce determination. Crowding back his uneasiness, a pride swept through Calhoun.

But the unease returned. He got to his house, wondering about Nita and the nearness of the time. Before he had kicked the snow off of him the door was flung open, and she was swaying there—Nita, her bright eyes filled with worry. He caught her to him quickly, held her tightly, reassuringly.

"Brent—it's time."

HE MOVED back looking at her pallid face, her bigness, and her unsteadiness. Fear cut deep into him. "I'll hitch up the buggy," he said.

The snow was not too deep. The buggy took the grade at a sliding, swerving descent. Calhoun lashed at the horse. Nita, bundled up warmly beside him, stared in a silence at the distant gaslights of the town. Calhoun thought about how much pain a woman could stand. How she could go through hell, the increased kicking adding to the agony, and then accept the suffering as a precious benevolence from God.

Calhoun could not look upon it so easily. As they neared the threshold of Main Street—where the slope leveled off into the business district—he had a panicky thought that things could go wrong. They weren't just old wives' tales, either, that prompted his misgivings. A lot of headstones in many town boothills could attest to that.

Suddenly he pulled up. A horseman was coming up the street and made a vague shape against the dark blustery storm and the blurry lights around. An unhurried man, Calhoun noticed.

"Brent." Nita clutched at his sleeve, her voice was tight with tension. "What's wrong?"

He did not answer; he could not answer; but he cursed to himself. He knew who was riding toward him. The tall figure loomed up plain, now—against the white, steep going. Calhoun had told Nita nothing about this familiar man. Sure, before he'd killed those other men, he had readily told her all about them. But this was different. There was no sense adding to her fears.

But he wasn't going to get away with it, not any temporary evasion this time, not with Clint Ferrand here and savoring the moment he'd long awaited. And, she knew about Monty, too, because he'd talked once or twice about the Ferrands, and she would think about Monty maybe riding into Challenge Hill.

Clint halted, lounged there in his saddle, seemingly unmindful of the storm's fury.

"Hi, Calhoun," Ferrand called out, airily. "Remember me?"

"Can't say you've changed any, Clint," Calhoun called back.

"Right," the other replied darkly. "You're the same, too. I never did forget that fight, Calhoun. No, and I never did like your butting in about Monty. Besides, I think that

good gun-slinging marshals are dead ones."

"Can't it wait?" Calhoun asked, crisply. "My wife's—"

Clint ignored Calhoun and dismounted with a deliberate motion. He stood in the middle of the street with his gun hand poised. The darkness hid the gloating cruelty that had stamped the man's face.

Calhoun pulled free of his wife's frantic hold, and came down from the buggy. He unbuttoned his mackinaw, to meet the advantage of the killer's open sheepskin. He started his slow walk down the hill, taking a path so that possible fire would not hit the buggy. As Clint turned to face him, the rays of a streetlamp fell upon his features. Calhoun could even see the twitching high cheekbones now, the alert eyes, and the tight grinning mouth—the familiar characteristics of Clint Ferrand.

Nita's piercing scream was a sound Calhoun would never forget. It came when Clint's hand reached for his gun. Calhoun, quickly drew his .45 from his holster to his waiting fingers. Clint's gun made a ragged roar into the night. But it was a trifle too late. Calhoun's bullet was already in the man's stomach. As it jolted all the accuracy out of Ferrand and sent him lurching backward into a streetside drift dropping his smoking weapon. Calhoun watched him die, as he'd watched the others die.

He felt the sickness again as he sheathed his gun, and went back to Nita. Some marshals, maybe, were calloused to sudden death of their own making. Some could kill without so much as a grimace, for they had built up a certain cold disregard. Brent Calhoun, however, was not of this breed. The dark mood would lay upon him for days, this shadowy wall between him and contentment.

BUT he tried not to think of it, just now. Once more seated in the buggy, he urged the horse to a faster pace, for the street was level here between the false-fronted buildings. The doors of buildings were banging, and men were coming out. Everywhere, people were staring at Brent Calhoun. The sound of guns still provoked curiosity in Challenge Hill.

Nita was saying, "Now I remember."

"What?" he asked, with a sharpness he couldn't curb.

"Clint Ferrand. Monty Ferrand. You mentioned them more than once. How Monty almost became Clint's partner and how you talked him out of it. Now he's raising a family."

Calhoun didn't say anything.

She went on: "Blood's awful thick, and he's bound to come."

"You can forget it," he said, bruquely. "Monty'll stay put." But he didn't believe what he said.

Newberry wasn't in sight. The gun-shots had probably drawn the eager night marshal toward the hill and what he hoped would be further action. Calhoun reached the hospital just in time. It was a long low structure built of pine, that had once served as Challenge Hill's first saloon. He placed Nita in the good hands of Doc Shelby. Then he went outside again after Doc's insistence that he stay out of the way for two hours. The storm was still ripping up the town, Calhoun noticed as he walked from the hospital, piling up high drifts over street and boardwalk. Calhoun drove his horse and buggy into the lean-to behind the hospital and slammed tight the sagging door. He spotted a couple of men going into the Black Jack Bar, and asked them to look for Newberry on the hill and help him with Clint's body.

Calhoun paced his town—keeping off the main drag. A man couldn't think too hard, against the storm, and maybe that's what he needed. Yet nothing could tear away the picture of Nita from his mind tonight. He had seen the fear on her face, when she recalled Monty Ferrand.

He dropped into his office later, hoping Clint would not be there. Newberry was warming cold stiffened hands before the pot bellied stove; soon the big night marshal would be making his second swing around the town. Calhoun sat down on a chair, and stared absently at a picture of a hunting-dog on the wall.

"I just dumped Ferrand off at Coffin Joe's," Newberry said. "A colt .45 makes quite a mess."

"You don't need to color it up, Ford," Calhoun said.

"Oh, sorry. Too bad it happened, right when Nita—"

"That's not the bad part, for her, Ford."

"Uh-huh," Newberry said. "This sidewinder's beyond doing you any harm. It's his brother that's lodged in your mind."

"Maybe he won't show."

"Maybe he won't at that," Newberry answered.

Calhoun got up. "Two hours, Doc said. He claims you can tell when the baby's due by how long the pains last and how long the lapses are in between. It's not quite time, but I'm going back."

"I'll bet forty to one, Brent, he'll cut that first tooth on a badge."

"If he does," Calhoun snapped, "I'll dust off his little behind."

He went out, and hurried back to the hospital. Maybe, after this was all over, they'd move away from Challenge Hill. He could always demand top wages on a ranch; and foreman's jobs would open up from time to time. Then he thought that maybe Jason Tharp would hire him back.

"Brent, everything's fine. Both mother and child are doing fine."

Those were the words he wanted to hear. Calhoun could have done a corn dance up and down the corridor.

"You mean it's all over? Can I see them, Doc?"

Doc Shelby, a rotund little man, smiled.

"It happened sooner than I figured. You can see them in a few minutes."

Calhoun wondered how he could contain himself. When finally Doc beckoned, he rushed to Nita's bedside. Then Nita's eyes glistened as she proudly turned back the cover. Calhoun stared. The little face was as red and wrinkled as a strawberry.

"A girl, Brent."

He had wanted a boy, but he didn't know when he had been happier.

"Sort of complicates things," he said and grinned. "We had counted on naming the baby Thomas George after your dad and mine."

"Do that, and she'll kick up quite a storm, Brent."

"I got it," Calhoun said. "We'll call her Betty Lee, after the first white woman to settle down in these parts."

"Betty Lee is beautiful."

CALHOUN wanted to touch the infant. But maybe he, Calhoun, had germs or something. He asked, "When can I bring my family home?"

"I won't be here a week, Doc says. That is, if there are no setbacks, and so the Calhouns will celebrate Christmas eve at home."

"That will be wonderful," Calhoun said with a smile.

She turned her head toward him, anxiously.

"Will he come soon? Monty, I mean?"

"Who says he's coming at all?"

"You know he's bound to come, Brent. What makes it hard, is not knowing when. Maybe it will be next week or maybe a month

---

## THE HORNED TOAD

By S. OMAR BARKER

***This warty chap, devoid of charm,***
***Likes sunny places, dry and warm.***
***Although his looks make some folks fear him,***
***His useful habits should endear him***
***To all, because he eats red ants up—***
***The kind that like to crawl your pants up!***

---

from now. It might even be a year or five years, but he will come."

"I'm not so sure," Calhound said. "Monty had good stuff in him. He's got too much to consider now before throwing it all away on trying to outdo my gun speed. You see, I know Monty pretty well."

She seemed not to be listening. "Maybe we ought to go away, Brent. Far away from here."

"We might do that," he said thoughtfully. "It's not only Monty—it's the rest of them that will come. Every time it's going to happen, you die a thousand times. And—every time I have to kill a man, I'll feel like a murderer."

"I know. I've seen it inside you, each time you went out to meet them. They deserved what they got, from the law's point of view—but it still hurt you."

Doc entered then, with a professional cough.

"You'll have to leave now, Brent. Come in anytime tomorrow."

Calhoun nodded. He kissed his wife, and brushed the head of the infant. "A pretty frisky pair," he said. "Don't let me hear of you two riding any wild broncs before sunup."

"Sounds real exciting." She laughed. "We might just do that, without saddles."

Calhoun left, with a new spryness in him now.

With dawn's rising, the snow stopped. It was a foot deep in places, though, and Calhoun walked through it slowly on his rounds. It was an uneventful morning—save for a freedom loving teenager tossing a rock through a schoolhouse window. Calhoun got the child, parents and principal together and came to an agreement. Junior would spend his Saturdays washing the other windows, for a certain length of time.

That afternoon, Jason Tharp rode in. The Butcherknife owner had business at the bank, but he made a point of seeing Calhoun.

"Brent,, you two-legged catamount." He gripped Calhoun's hand. "So you became a father overnight, I hear. Well, I'm real proud, and waiting to see the little vixen. How's my niece doing?"

"Both doing first-rate," Calhoun answered.

Tharp was abrupt, now. "How's the lawdog business?"

"I'm getting by," Calhoun said, almost carelessly.

"The way I hear it, not just so-so," Tharp went on. "You got this town so meek, they say, it'll inherit the earth. And that's why I'm here. Pete Miller, my foreman, up and quit on me. He staked out a claim on Conniption Creek, and got himself snagged by a waitress from Sacrifice Falls."

Brent Calhoun knew what was coming.

"Come back to Butcherknife, son, and I'll up the ante. I'll even throw up some quarters for you and Nita and the young one. You aren't needed here any more; a tenderfoot could keep things in tow. Dadgummit, you were the best foreman I ever had, even if I'm not inclined to swell up a head with praise. I could ransack the State and still couldn't come up with anyone who measures up to you."

"Thanks, Jason, for the offer." Calhoun was bothered by a thought about Monty—and a vengeance that might go beyond a ripped-off, marshal's star, and extend out to Butcherknife, or anywhere.

"How about it, Brent? I got to know before the holidays."

"I'll think about it," Calhoun said. "I sure will."

He did, too. What Tharp would pay might even match what he was getting for this special marshal's job. Once more he could have the feel of a horse between his knees, be out where he could smell summer's grass and see the leggy calves grow into fat, wobbling, healthy cows.

Nita had loved it out there and it was a place to raise a youngster.

Minutes later he was with Nita, and Doc assured him she could be home Christmas Eve.

Her dark eyes shone with a new radiance and she happily returned his kisses. He held little Betty Lee in his arms, and noticed that she already looked like her mother. During moments like these, he forgot about the hate and greed that made devils of men. He forgot that his gun had to be quicker than theirs in order that families like the Calhouns could live in peace.

AS HE patrolled Challenge Hill he pondered Tharp's offer again and again. He was a misfit here for all of his gun-swiftness, for there was a softness in him that he could find no shame for.

Sundown found him stamping his tired, icy feet into his office, where Newberry was waiting.

"Ford," he said. "I hate this job. I got a chance to ramrod Butcherknife again and I'm going to."

Newberry turned with his swivel chair. He eyed Calhoun. "You're not powerfully happy in this town. That's a fact," he said.

"Let somebody else be their paid killer." Calhoun was walking in circles. "I've had enough."

"So," Newberry said, "you're seeing the ghosts again."

Calhoun whirled on him. "I'll never stop seeing them, Ford. It's plain as if it just happened—the Snake River Kid coming in. All right, he did pull on me, and I had to protect my skin. But I had stilled a man's pulse and I'm not tough hided enough to laugh that off."

"A cocky youngster, asking for it," Newberry nodded. "He was a glory-grabber, like Clint, though maybe without the personal grudge."

"Ten days later, Johnny Blackfoot threw down on me," Calhoun went on. "Some said he had Indian blood in him, that he was unreasonable. There he was, drawing without warning, as I was coming through the Palace of Pleasure batwings. Again, I managed to be fast enough. But why did he draw on me, Ford? Why?"

"There's no telling sometimes."

Calhoun said, "Just before Clint, there was Matt Elrod. He was making his lone wolf, daylight stab at sticking up the Stockman's National. Then he found himself swapping lead with me. And, before I came to this country, there were two others. I tagged them trying to crack a ranch-house safe. Of all of them, Clint Ferrand deserved a bullet the most, but I'm not skipping through the streets with glee."

The night marshal riffled some papers. "It was good riddance," he growled, "to the lot of them."

But Calhoun ignored that. He paused in the middle of the room. "Monty would hurt me the most," he said thoughtfully. "We were saddle pals together, even if we had a little trouble at the start. Maybe that's enough I tell myself over and over, to keep Monty away."

Now Newberry rose, and faced him. A fire, Calhoun hadn't seen before, burned back the usual mildness in his eyes.

"Enough? I'd say it was, if I've got him pegged right. Didn't he know Clint for what he was? Didn't he know it was bound to happen to Clint, sooner or later? If not by your gun it would have been somebody else's. Me, I ain't got no marrying yen and I hope I never have, but I reckon I can understand a family man. Likely, Monty'll have increased his brood by now. He'll think twice before he'll squander all his gains on a single trigger-squeeze. Seems to me you're needlessly worrying about Monty."

"But Ford. I—"

"I'm not through with you yet." Newberry came toward him. "You want to turn in your star. Not because you're yellow, because you're not. But if you went out to Butcherknife, you'd still be running away and leaving work in Challenge Hill half-finished."

"Ford," Calhoun said, exasperated, "you don't understand."

"I think I do. Every man's got a talent, a calling. Yours is marshalling, even if you want to retch your stomach empty over every unpleasant job. I'm no philosopher, but you were picked for this, Brent. Challenge Hill needs you till there hasn't even been a dog-fight to bust up the monotony. You got a woman and a kid, sure, and some day they might look at you in a pine box. But remember, there's other women and kids and all of them want the thing you can help give them. Nita is a lawman's wife, and she'll live with her lot, whatever it may be."

Calhoun muttered an oath and drove his right fist into his left palm.

"All your work isn't killing, Brent. Some of it's right pleasant. Take Junior, for instance. He's going to hate washing those windows, but maybe some day he'll look back

and say it was Marshal Brent Calhoun who started him on a straight trail."

Remembering, Calhoun had to smile, in spite of himself.

"How about just the other day, too, when Hoak Pressley tried to pull a holdup? He was wearing a gunny-sack mask, and his .45 was trembling in his hand. He went into Pimberton's Grocery and held old Pimberton and the customers at bay. You knew Pressley and his family, and the God awful squalor they lived in out on his claim. You strolled into the situation, taking off your gun."

"I knew Pressly pretty well," Calhoun began. "I guessed—"

"That's just the point," Newberry snapped. "You knew him. Pressley threatened to shoot but you kept coming and ordered him to drop his gun. Pressley didn't do that, but he didn't resist when you took it out of his hand. The man began to cry, then; saying he must have gone crazy seeing his family suffer so. And you coaxed Pimberton into remembering it was nearly Christmas. Pimberton hesitated a while but he extended Pressley credit, saying he could work it out clerking after the holidays."

Calhoun sent a chair skidding with his boot. He rammed hands into his pockets.

"I could go on," Newberry said. "Yesterday, you stopped a hassle over cards in the Golden Mare. You never did know who was cheating who, if at all, but you had the two gents shaking hands, and buying each other a round of drinks."

"Humph," Calhoun said, skeptically. "Maybe it wasn't my business."

"I might mention a dozen times, Brent, when you stepped in and stopped what could have been a bloody mess. I'll never be fast enough to make history in Challenge Hill, and maybe I wish I could take your place, but the deck isn't stacked that way. Meanwhile, we do our particular jobs and somehow we locate our pleasures."

Calhoun said it, with a shrug: "I hadn't expected a lecture, but I sure got one."

HE WENT out thinking about what Newberry had said. Climbing the hill, he weighed what a move out to Butcherknife would accomplish. Certainly, the glory-grabbers could find him there. And if the worst came out in Monty, a move to South America wouldn't be far enough away from the younger Ferrand. As it stood, Brent Calhoun could either turn in his badge and try to hang up his gun or he could go on with inevitable killings.

The days dragged themselves onward, like Calhoun's heavy boots, and now it was the afternoon before Christmas.

The town was getting ready to be festive. Stores milled with people doing their last minute buying. Buckboards came and went, having difficulty on the snow-packed trails and burdened with the makings of a time of gaiety on far-flung farms and ranches. In the saloons, men weaved and laughed and called for additional spirits. And as he walked his wet streets, Calhoun saw the ornamented trees in the windows.

After sundown, he got the buggy and went after Nita and Betty Lee. New snow had just begun to fall, spreading a feathery topping over the old crust. On the drive back, Nita snuggled close to him, Betty Lee in her arms. Both were bundled warm.

"It's going to be a snowy Christmas," Nita said. "I wanted it like that."

Calhoun said, grinning, "I ordered it for you, honey."

She stared straight ahead. "I've been such a fool, Brent," she said abruptly.

"About what?"

"Worrying about Monty Ferrand. I've had a lot of time to think, and I see I'm wrong."

Calhoun nodded. "I guess," he said, "we got upset over nothing."

"He won't come, Brent. I'm sure of it now. The Ferrands must be a happy family, even if Monty's saddened somewhat over Clint. He's not going to destroy all that happiness. Why, the way you talk about him, it almost seems as if I know him."

"Like I've told myself a thousand times," Calhoun said, "even with snow on the trails, he'd have been here by now, if he was so inclined. Monty reads the newspaper, and it carried the story, I'm sure. He knows all right."

They reached home; the log fire Calhoun had built was crackling loudly. Nita placed

Betty Lee in the pine slab cradle Brent had spent his evenings making. The Christmas tree, he had cut earlier in the week, sparkled with candles and ornaments. Nita prepared supper, while he set the table. Calhoun was thinking. Nothing can hurt this—nothing. Tonight, we can shut off the outside world. There's only the three of us, Nita, Betty Lee and myself.

The banging on the door crashed broadside into his thinking.

In two, startled strides he was sweeping his gun into his hand from the mantel. He had taken it off, hoping, for this one night, he wouldn't need it. Without looking at Nita, he was moving to the door, then jerking it open and stepping away. A man burst inside. Calhoun blinked. It was Jaffy Creede, the town hostler.

"Monty Ferrand—just hit town. He's downing a couple of tall ones in the Black Jack. He's talking ugly, about coming and killing you. He forced Sam the Swamper into telling him where you live."

That outside world, now, closed once more around Brent Calhoun. He let the gun sag. So Nita and he had been wrong. They tried to tell themselves Monty wasn't this much of a fool. Beside him, Nita's breath was catching with fear.

"Thanks, Jaffy," he heard himself saying. "Better get out now."

When Jaffy left, Calhoun got his belt and buckled it on, and shoved the gun hard into the holster.

"Brent, you can't—" She came close and gripped his arm.

"What else can I do?" He shook himself free. "There's you and the baby to think about. It can't happen—in here."

He kissed her and got into his mackinaw, leaving it unbuttoned. He started for the door, without a backward look. There was so much that he was leaving here that it pained him to look back again.

THE door opened wide. Monty Ferrand, snow dripping from his opened coat, stood framed there.

"Brent Calhoun." He struggled to see against the lampglow; and Calhoun could have killed him then. "Papers made you out quite a hero over what you did to Clint, Brent."

Here it was screaming at him again, Calhoun thought, the fact that some men beg so hard for a bullet that they get it, and Calhoun always felt remorse after answering their plea. Whatever logic he had ascribed to Monty's ways suddenly went glimmering. The wild streak, which Calhoun had attempted to curb, had come out once more, and had brought Monty over the miles to this doorway—an impatient, waiting figure full of hate. A wife, back on the Flats, had been forgotten, as was a child, or maybe children. There was no explaining it, this teetering off-balance. Except that there was something mystifying, terrifying, about a blood tie.

"You killed Clint," Monty said, heavily. "You must've got a lot of joy out of that Brent, besides building a big reputation bigger. Now I'm inviting you to draw."

"Not here, Monty." Calhoun said it evenly. "We'll carry this fracas outside." He stared, reflecting that Monty had a handsomeness about him, something clean-cut, where his brother had been ugly. He wondered for an instant, if Monty had been driving himself into this thing . . . until now it was driving him.

Instead of backing out, however, Monty came forward. He blinked against the light and seemed to see the room for the first time. There was a slight shakiness to his movements as if his warm drinks were hitting him. But he made out Nita and the sleeping child and the tree, and he nodded at some deep thought of his as he slowly backed outside.

Marshal Brent Calhoun followed.

On the hilly street, now, he made ready to deal out justice from the holster. The only justice, it seemed, Monty could understand. They faced each other, not far apart, and there was enough snow blurred shine from the gaslights to see by. It was just such a night, on this same hill, Calhoun remembered, that he had brought Clint to his death.

Monty drew. Was there a hesitance in it? Calhoun was not at all sure, as he sent his own hand dipping, pulling, and lining. Monty's gun was jumping from leather—but Calhoun had time enough to place his shot where he wanted it.

It knocked Monty's unfired weapon flying. The man lurched to get his balance, and gripped his bleeding hand. Holstering his gun, Calhoun came forward.

"I must've been crazy," Monty was saying, with great effort—with sudden obvious realization. "When I read the news about Clint, it didn't make sense, not even to myself. All I could think of was that kin of mine had been downed by your gun. Mary tried to reason with me, but I found myself going—heading for Challenge Hill. But a hundred times on the trail, I want you to know, I thought myself an idiot and wanted to turn back. Yet I kept on."

He got his breath, and then went on: "You could have killed me but you didn't. You could have been killed yourself. Brent, my eyes are wide open now. Clint got what he deserved. It had to be the way it happened. You're the same old Brent. I came here, not expecting what I found: Brent Calhoun, a family man, like myself, in his own home celebrating Christmas Eve. That's where I should be. . . ."

He went away, then, not bothering to pick up his gun. He got on his horse and he rode. Calhoun never saw him again, but he knew that Monty had shut off the last of his wildness.

Back in the house, holding Nita close, Calhoun had the sudden conviction that there were sufficient pleasant aspects about toting a six-pointed star, even though the sickness still would come when his gun flamed. Nita must remind herself that she was a lawman's wife. And Jason Tharp would have to look elsewhere for his foreman.

Together they bent over and smiled down at the tiny shape in the cradle. . . .

*Coming up in the next issue*

## THE WOMAN AT WAGONWHEEL

***Lee fought two battles for Ann . . . one against the rustlers, and one against his own unruly desires***

**A Magazine-Length Novel**

**By RAY GAULDEN**

## QUEEN OF JACOB'S KINGDOM

***To Rachel, a man's name could be more important than his worldly goods . . . or even his character***

**An Exciting Novelette**

**By SEVEN ANDERTON**

## TO KNOW THE TRUTH

***Adella had to prove she was as clever as any man***

**A Western Short Story**

**By TODHUNTER BALLARD**

*"What in blazes are you doing here?" Combs demanded*

# Hallowe'en All Winter

a true story by

J. J. Kerttula and D. L. McDonald

WARS were an integral part of the West. Indian against Indian along the buffalo trails of the plains, or white man against white in Pleasant Valley or Lincoln County, it all added up to bloodshed. But it remained for Montana to come up with less lethal battling in her Cramer Gulch timber war. That was one war which left no bitterness, no sorrow, no widows or orphans—just one round of good, clean fun from fall to spring. Probably only Montana, land of unique people and fabulous events, could have staged a war like that, where everyone involved had a wonderful time.

It started when the Northern Pacific pushed its line through Hellgate Canyon in order to ship lumber from the western part of the state,

which until then had been too far from the gold camps for profitable ox-freighting. In the rush to cash in on these magnificent stands of pine, spruce, Douglas fir and larch, a rash of new lumber companies was born. Among them were the Big Blackfoot Company, organized by the Hammonds of Missoula, and the Thompson Company, which belonged to Bill Thompson, later mayor of Butte.

Until 1886 the new companies found plenty to keep them busy close to home base, but by then Big Blackfoot had exhausted the timber on the Bonita flats. Bill Thompson, too, was looking for new forests. By late summer of that year both outfits had timber cruisers in Cramer Gulch, which joined Hellgate at Bonita. There they found timber almost as good as in Hellgate. By September Big Blackfoot was constructing camps, roads, bridges, and generally preparing for logging on a big scale that fall.

Thompson realized that moving into Cramer Gulch territory would entail bucking the Big Blackfoot. He spent one night thinking it over, and early next morning loaded a crew of fifty tough French-Canadian loggers, under a foreman named LeLong, onto a special freight train and shipped them to Bonita. On October 6, 1886, they unloaded practically under the nose of Bob Combs, foreman for Big Blackfoot Company, and moved unmolested up Cramer Gulch. It was, in fact, three days before Combs found out what was afoot. As soon as he did, he ordered all his crews on the trail and lit out after them.

At the Thompson camp, LeLong saw the approaching army from some distance and called his men together. He knew the Big Blackfoot boss, Combs, to be a big, blustery lumberjack from New Brunswick, bold when the odds were in his favor but not too likely to press his luck if they weren't. LeLong went to meet him, swinging his double-bitted axe.

"What in blazes are you doing here?" Combs demanded.

"Same thing you are, I guess. Getting ready to log off Cramer Gulch."

"Like hell you are! This is Big Blackfoot timber. Get your crews out plenty fast or I'll—"

"You won't do a damned thing, Combs. This is free land, and the timber belongs to whoever can cut it. We aim to start cutting. Tell you what I'll do, though. I'll fight you, man to man, for the timber. Loser gets out." To emphasize his offer LeLong sent the axe sailing toward a stump a good thirty feet away. It landed bit-first, sank to the shaft and stood there quivering. It took strength and skill to drive an axe that way, and Combs stepped back.

"Why should I fight you for the timber we already have?" he sneered. Then, to his men, who outnumbered Thompson's crew almost two-to-one, he shouted, "Go on, boys, run these damned Frenchies over the hill."

Willingly enough, his men moved forward to obey, while Combs lingered in the background. The Thompson men were driven back momentarily, but soon they rallied. The Big Blackfoot men, figuring rightly that their three dollars a day didn't cover tangling with a bunch of hot-blooded Frenchies armed with peaveys and cant hooks, withdrew down the gulch. When his men had chased the Big Blackfoot crews around the bend, LeLong called them back.

"Who ran who over the hill?" he taunted Combs, as that worthy followed his men out of sight.

It didn't take an expert to know that this encounter meant that Combs was through as a leader, if the two companies were going to make a fight of it.

On the other side of Hellgate canyon, some distance up Rock Creek, the Big Blackfoot company had another camp with a man named Bill Harris in charge. He was hastily summoned to take over the Cramer Gulch crews. Early next morning he led his men up the trail to parley at the Thompson camp.

LeLONG saw them coming and gathered his men in a tight knot to wait for them. Harris halted his crews fifty feet from the Frenchies and went forward alone to meet LeLong.

"I hear," he said in greeting, "you offered to fight for this timber yesterday. Does the offer still hold?"

LeLong laughed and shook his head. "You see," he said, "I know Combs."

"I'll fight any two of you, then," Harris offered.

"Nope."

"Any three of you?"

"You're wasting your time and mine, Harris," LeLong told him. "If Big Blackfoot was able to run us off, they'd have done it yesterday. You're a sensible man, I don't figure you want to send your men against my boys and their peaveys. There's plenty of timber in Cramer Gulch to keep us both busy all winter. And we aim to have our share of it."

Harris agreed to put the matter up to their respective bosses. Thompson and the Hammonds thought it over. There was considerable argument, they felt, against a couple of hundred loggers fighting it out with axes and peaveys for timber that, after all, probably belonged to the Government, if anybody got technical enough to check. Some sort of compromise seemed indicated.

The two companies drew up an agreement whereby each would stick to his own side of the Gulch until all the worthwhile timber there had been cut. Only when one crew or the other had exhausted its own supply would the question of crossing the gulch be brought up. It was a good enough solution and might have panned out if tensions hadn't already built up to a high pitch. It was one thing to sign copies of the pact in Butte and Missoula; it was some different to try to obey its stipulations in Cramer Gulch.

There was a lot of good timber in the Gulch, and Harris set out to get most of it. He manned his camps and sent every lumberjack he could hire into the woods. Since Big Blackfoot had its own mill at Bonita he was able to out-log the Thompson outfit two to one. But if LeLong's French Canadians couldn't log off Cramer Gulch as fast as the Big Blackfoot crews, they had plenty of ideas for equalizing the actual take.

One unwritten agreement between the two factions never was broken. Once a tree was cut and the brand of its owner stamped into the butt, that tree was company property, and no attempts were ever made to hijack such logs. But there were other forms of mischief to slow up each other's logging, and none of these were overlooked.

At first, as was the custom, both sides left their tools in the timber at least part of the time. But as Big Blackfoot crews soon found out a couple of swipes with a file, sometime in the night, was all it took to put an axe or a good crosscut out of commission. They retaliated in kind. It's likely that there never were loggers before or since as neat about puting away their tools as those two crews that winter of 1886.

THAT was the winter, too, when no teamster worth his salt started out without checking and double-checking his load and the tension of his chains to make sure his whole outfit wasn't hitched to a nearby stump with the chains cleverly hidden under the snow. Any loaded sled or wagon left outside was sure to be frozen down solid by morning, though sometimes the water necessary for the job had been carried in buckets for a quarter of a mile. There was no such thing as too much work if it could annoy the other side. Chains were loosened, loads dumped, mules or oxen unhitched and driven down the road for a mile or two.

One favorite trick, which involved considerable disregard for the rigors of a Montana winter night, was to sneak over to the opposing camp in the chill, after-midnight hours to plug the stovepipes, thus smoking out the entire crew of sleeping men. As they stumbled out into the snow coughing and half-dressed, the jokers stood at a safe distance to taunt them. There must have been a painful undertone to the taunting, for only too well they knew that a few nights later the call would be returned, if possible with some new twist.

In their enthusiasm the loggers sometimes forgot their limitations and tried to chop through half-inch logging chains in their attempts to dump each others loads. This was a practice both companies deplored, for they were company axes. To put a stop to it, both front offices issued a decree that in future the price of all such ruined axes would be taken out of the pay of the men responsible. But somehow neither LeLong nor Harris were ever quite able to decide just who had been at fault when such an incident occurred, and the companies unwillingly had to keep buying axes or quit operations.

Though a good part of the mischief originated with LeLong's French-Canadians in

their efforts to slow up the swifter-paced Big Blackfoots, it remained for two of Harris' men to pull what was probably the prize stunt of the winter. Two rough boys named Clark and Corbett, whom Harris had kept on as his personal bodyguards when things seemed dangerous, found themselves with time on their hands as the winter progressed and the Cramer Gulch timber war settled down into its light-hearted vein. Posing as buckers, working somewhat apart from the other Thompson Company men, they followed behind LeLong's fallers for several days before someone got curious about them. Then they had to drop their tools and run. Instead of bucking the trees into logs, they had been busily cutting them halfway through every few feet, thus completely ruining them for timber. But even this depredation, viewed across seventy years, seems more light-hearted than vindictive in a country where good timber was still as thick as fleas on a dog.

Though it lasted from early fall to late next spring, the Cramer Gulch timber war took no lives. At worst it riled up tempers and spoiled a few thousand feet of lumber. Teamsters had to hoof it back to camp sometimes, but no one was shot out of his sadde. Drygulching, despite unlimited opportunities for it, was unknown.

The truth is, it was a war the combatants themselves thoroughly enjoyed. It was, you might say, a case of playing at Hallowe'en all winter.

---

# KNOW YOUR WEST

**1. Approximately what distance could an expert Indian bowman of the old frontier shoot an arrow effectively: 25, 50, 100, 150, 200, or 300 yards?**

**2. What did old-time cowboys mean when they said somebody was suspected of "riding with an extra cinch ring?"**

**3. What did the oldtimers mean when they said of a man that "he got sawdust in his beard?"**

**4. Buck hooks, buzz saws, can openers, cartwheels, Chihuahuas, danglers, diggers, petmakers, rib wrenches and Kellys are cowboy slang for varying styles of what?**

**5. The expression "keeping cases" on a man, meaning to watch or keep close track of him, comes from what gambling game popular in frontier days?**

**6. Though classed as carnivores, coyotes will eat many foods besides meat. Name three non-meat foods that coyotes like.**

**7. You know Reno is in Nevada, but El Reno, population about 11,000, is in what state noted for many Indians in its population?**

**8. The Tonto Basin and Mogollon Rim, both noted for bloody range wars in the old West, are in what state?**

**9. Billy the Kid was once jailed at the very old village of Mesilla (May-SEEL-yah), some 40 miles from El Paso, Texas—in what state?**

**10. Santa Fe is a place name in New Mexico, Florida, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Colorado and California. Also the name of a railroad. "Santa" means "Holy." What does "Fe" (Fay) means?**

***—Rattlesnake Robert***

---

**You will find the answers to these questions on page 113. Score yourself 2 points for each question you answer correctly. 20 is a perfect score. If your total is anywhere from 16 to 20, you're well acquainted with the customs and history of the cow country. If your total score is anywhere from 8 to 14, you will have things to learn. If you're below 8, better get busy polishing up your knowledge of the West.**

THERE'S a man you'll often see in the arena, if you see many rodeos, who never rides a bronc, ropes a calf, or dives for the horns of a steer. His name is Devere Helfrich, and he stays on the ground or perhaps perches on the fence. But he's as badly bitten by the rodeo bug as any top-hand.

Devere rodeos with a camera, and he has taken some of the greatest rodeo action pictures ever made. When you see a spectacular shot of a bronc somersaulting or a cowboy caught in midair before he lands in the dirt, the chances are you'll also see a credit to Devere Helfrich beneath the picture.

Devere is in his early fifties now, and he's spent almost forty of those years becoming a better photographer. He started fooling around with a Brownie Number 2 when he was in high school. He took the usual amateur shots of pets and his family, until he saw his first rodeo.

"Then," he says, "I knew what my camera was for."

It was a long time, though, before he was confident enough of himself to work with his camera in rodeo full time.

He grew up in an Oregon ranching family, and then went into business (hardware and furniture) in Klamath Falls. When the war started, he was married and running an ice cream store there. Photography was only his hobby, until wartime rationing of sugar made ice cream difficult to produce. At that point he decided to make photography his business, although film was just about as hard to come by as sugar.

Jerry Ambler, the former rodeo champ, was a friend of his, and through Jerry Devere began meeting contestants. He found that cowboys were eager for pictures of rodeo action.

They wanted photographs of themselves, other cowboys, good broncs, and tough bulls, so that they could study riding and roping form and discover the weaknesses or peculiarities of the stock.

Devere loved photographing rodeo better than anything else in the world, but he didn't for a moment believe he could make a living at it. But in rodeo's post-war boom, he and his wife Helen (who was also by now bitten by the rodeo bug) found themselves rushing from show to show, having a wonderful time, and making a good living besides.

He believes that his early experience with cattle and horses as a young boy helps him today.

"I used to punch cattle and chase wild horses as a kid," he says. "I think that gave me my instinctive feeling about what a bull or a bronc is going to do next."

He prides himself on his own safety record. He has been in the midst of arena action hundreds of times, and has only been injured twice. In Cheyenne a few years ago, a bareback bronc threw his rider, and then made straight for Devere, knocked him down and trampled him.

"That was one bronc," he says, "that I had figured wrong."

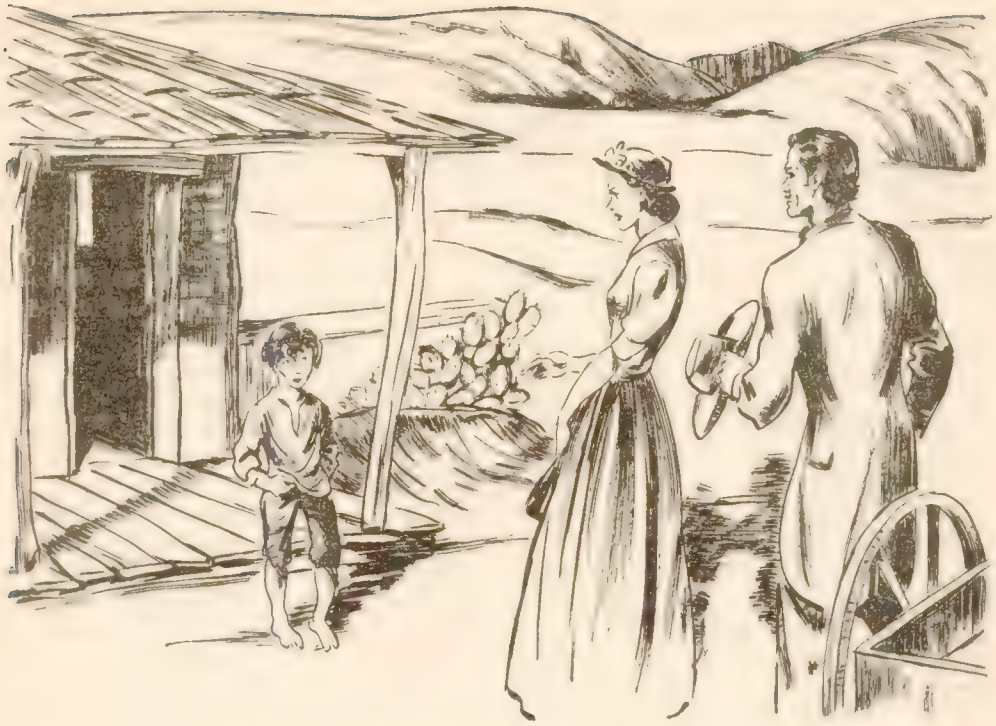
In Portland, Ore., he was focussing on a mean Brahma. That time he had his escape route (over the chute gate and out of the arena) all picked out, in case the Brahma charged, the escape route was completely covered with scrambling cowboys. Devere escaped with nothing worse than head-to-foot bruises.

He is naturally interested in saving his own neck, but that's not the only reason Devere tries to stay out of the way.

"The arena," he says, "belongs to the cowboys. Nobody wants a photographer getting in the way of the action."

*Adios,*

THE EDITORS



# *PREACHER'S WIFE*

*By WILLIAM HEUMAN*

IT WAS not the heat, nor the dust, nor the pitiless west Kansas sun which got Martha Truesdale down. It was the monotony of things here in Grant City, one day following the next like numbers on the pages of a calendar, and nothing happening. She was going through the motions of living like a person in a dream.

The heat had its effect, too. You couldn't think clearly. Walking under the protective shadow of the wooden awnings along the street, Martha could feel the hot rays trying to reach in toward her, to grasp her, and beat her down.

She knew it was foolish, but she hated the sun, and she hated the six inches of dust in the street, and she hated these dry, crackling boards under her feet. She almost hated the people of Grant City, even though she knew that most of them had been kind to her and the Reverend Thomas Truesdale, her husband, in the six weeks they'd been here.

Passing the Longhorn Bar on her way west down the main street, she saw two men coming out through the bat-wing doors. They looked at her with interest at first because she was young and because she was not hard to look at, even though she dressed quite prim-

***Martha couldn't escape temptation while her husband was away***

***. . . she had to face a devil with smiling eyes and curly black hair***

ly. She had nut-brown hair and brown eyes to go with it. Her features were small and even the nose upturned a little, which was wrong because most preachers' wives for one reason or another had turned-down noses. She'd noticed that.

She was fairly tall and slender, and she walked with an errect carriage. The plain gingham gown she wore swished as she went past the door of the Longhorn bar, revealing a trim ankle. Under the gaze of the two men coming out of the saloon she flushed a little, staring straight ahead of her, and the extra color in her cheeks made her even prettier.

She heard one of the men murmur as she went by,

"Parson's wife."

That eliminated her; that made her as animate as a hitch-rail, and Martha Truesdale resented it. There was a frown on her face as she turned into the Imperial Dry Goods store at the next corner, Washbon C. Briggs, Prop.

W. C. Briggs was a pillar of the church to which Thomas Truesdale had been called from his New Hampshire congregation. Mr. Briggs was a short man with a paunch and an almost bald head. He came down along the wooden counter, piled high with bolts of cloth. He was smiling, affable, a good, solid man in the community, a good churchman, too.

"Afternoon, Mrs. Truesdale," Washbon Briggs greeted her.

Martha Truesdale smiled at him, the minister's wife's smile, the one with which she had to greet people after service each Sunday noon. She paused down along the counter, fingering the bolts of cloth, noting some of the colors and patterns, looking at them a little wistfully, knowing that she could never make a dress out of them.

There were certain rules and regulations to which a minister's wife had to subscribe. She had to conduct herself in just such a manner; she had to dress exactly so. If she made a dress out of something which would show to advantage her figure and her face, she would be open to condemnation. A minister's wife should not be flaunting herself in front of other men.

Martha Truesdale said, without much enthusiasm, "I am buying a few yards of material for a dress, Mr. Briggs."

Washbon Briggs ran a fat hand across his bald head. He watched Mrs. Truesdale fingering a bolt of blue cloth with polka-dots. The blue had caught her eye immediately. She felt that she looked well in blue, and she hadn't worn a blue dress in the two years they'd been married.

"This—," she started to say, but Washbon Briggs was walking down the counter, coming back with a bolt of plain brown cloth. She hated brown; it seemed that she'd worn brown ever since she married Thomas.

"This will make a nice dress, Mrs. Truesdale," Washbon Briggs told her. He looked down at the bolt of blue on which she still rested her hand, and she thought she saw a small measure of pity in his blue eyes.

Mr. Briggs knew that she'd look much better in the blue, but he also knew that Mrs. Briggs, and a long list of other ladies in the Grant City church, would not approve of it, which meant that Martha Truesdale could not wear it.

"I'll look around," Mrs. Truesdale murmured. She glanced wistfully at the bolt of blue, came back to it once to look at it again, and then ordered the brown. Washbon Briggs had been in the church eighteen years. He knew better than Martha Truesdale what she should wear as the minister's wife. Probably he'd been picking out the material for other minister's wives before the Truesdales came to Grant City.

Martha watched him, trying to keep the resentment out of her eyes as he cut the cloth. Mr. Briggs was saying,

"The Reverend leave for Red Rock this morning, ma'am?"

Martha nodded. "He'll be coming back on the afternoon stage tomorrow," she stated, and as she thought of the long, lonely hours ahead of her, the resentment in her eyes deepened.

Thomas, of course, had his work to do. As a minister in a sparsely populated area, he was called upon occasionally to travel long distances to conduct a funeral or to marry a hopeful couple. At Red Rock it was a wedding, and Red Rock had no minitser.

With Thomas riding the stage up to Red Rock, she would have to while away the long hours of the afternoon, the longer hours of

the evening, and then another intolerable morning.

She'd decided to work on the dress while Thomas was gone in order to pass the hours more quickly. Thomas was young and kind, a good husband, a man with a passion for his work. He'd had a good congregation in the little New Hampshire town where he'd met and married his wife, but the call had come from the raw West and he'd heeded it.

WALKING down the street, her bundle of brown cloth under her arm, Martha Truesdale remembered that town and the little church. It had been built on a knoll with green grass and trees all around it. The grass here was brown, and there were no trees, except a scraggly cottonwood or two.

She remembered the spring day they'd been married. It had rained in the morning, and in the afternoon the sun came out, making the raindrops glisten on the grass and on the flowers. There was the smell of rain, of cool earth, of flowers.

It never rained here. For a month and a half it had not rained, and the sun was a brass ball set up in the blue of the sky. It seemed never to move. It had dried up all the rain in the whole world, and it would never rain again.

A mist came up in front of Martha Truesdale's eyes, and she stumbled a little over an uneven section of the boardwalk. Trying to regain her balance, she dropped the bolt of cloth, and then she felt a hand on her arm, a masculine hand, steadying her. She could feel the strength in that hand, and yet it was gentle.

"Reckon we'd better get these walks repaired, ma'am," the owner of the hand murmured.

The bundle had rolled away, and Martha stepped forward to pick it up, but she was too late. That same smooth, brown hand reached forward, retrieving the bundle.

A little flustered, Martha said, "Thank you."

She was looking up into a lean, brown face which was vaguely familiar. He was a tall man, tall and cool in his black frock coat, clean white shirt, and string tie. He wore a black, flat-crowned hat, which also was very clean, and his black boots were polished.

Martha Truesdale found herself wondering how a man could keep his boots that clean in all this dust. The tall man in the black coat was saying,

"Bad stretch of walk ahead, Mrs. Truesdale. I could walk you up to the parsonage."

He had dark eyes and rather long lashes for a man. His mouth was wide, but well-shaped, a little smile playing around the corners. Martha Truesdale noticed the slight break in the bridge of his nose which in no way spoiled his good looks. He was the most handsome man she'd seen in Grant City, or anywhere else for that matter.

Then with a shock she realized who he was. And there she stood with him on the main street of the town, undoubtedly with eyes swiveling in their direction already.

She said hastily, her voice uncertain, "Thank you. I can manage, Mr. Overmire."

Dallas Overmire, professional gambler at the big Cattleman's Bar, inclined his head slightly. She'd seen him before on the streets of Grant City, usually standing out in front of the Cattleman's Bar, tall and cool, always impeccably dressed. She'd always seen him from a distance. He'd been pointed out to her disapprovingly by members of the Grant City church.

As her husband represented all that was good in the town, Dallas Overmire symbolized the evil. He was a gambler who enticed the young riders into the gambling house, stripping them of their month's wages. He represented the sin and evil the Reverend Truesdale excoriated every Sunday morning from his pulpit. But Martha couldn't help being uncomfortably aware of how handsome he was, standing there, his hat in his hand now, his jet black hair slightly curled, low on his neck.

"I—I can manage," Martha Truesdale repeated.

She walked on, then, her face a little flushed, conscious of the fact that Dallas Overmire was watching her, knowing that he was smiling, even though she didn't dare look back to make sure.

She saw the door of Mrs. MacLean's house across the way, and she had a brief glimpse of Mrs. MacLean's long, horse face. Jeff Mac-

Lean was the blacksmith in town, another pillar of the church.

Martha Truesdale stared straight ahead of her as she walked as fast as she could in the direction of the church and the personage. She could still feel the spot where Dallas Overmire's fingers had touched her arm. It was sinful, but the arm tingled pleasantly.

She didn't stop walking until she had closed the door behind her in the empty parsonage. Then she sat there for a long time before getting up to put the bolt of cloth away. She didn't even open the package.

It was hot in the house, hot and quiet. She could hear the clock ticking out in the kitchen, and the buzzing of a fly in the room. She walked around the parlor once, noting the worn furniture which had been left by the previous preacher, looking at the pictures on the wall. Then she came back and sat down on the sofa again. She was breathing faster now, and her head was beginning to whirl. The walls of the room seemed to be converging on her, squeezing the life out of her. She had to get out.

She ran to the kitchen door, and then stood there, gripping the door jamb.

She called, "Ben! Ben!"

Old Ben Schiller, who worked on the place for them, came around the corner of the wagon shed, white hair ruffled as usual, rubbing his horny hands on the faded levis.

"Will you harness the gray and bring the buckboard around to the front of the house, Ben, please," Martha Truesdale said.

"Yes, ma'am," Ben Schiller nodded.

It was not too unusual for her to go out riding alone. Ocassionally, in the past she'd had Ben harness the horse, and she'd driven the buckboard out into the country, usually up the old stage road which led to Boswell.

The kitchen clock told her that it was three o'clock in the afternoon, the hottest part of the day, and not too pleasant in the sun, but she had to get out. She had to get away from these walls.

TEN MINUTES later she drove out of Grant City. She had to pass the Cattleman's Bar at the corner of Main and Washington Streets, and she kept her eyes away from the porch and the bat-wing doors, staring straight ahead of her as the buckboard rolled by. She did notice that the porch was empty.

She went on, the buckboard rolling over the little wooden bridge which spanned Coroner Creek, and she noticed that the Creek was entirely dry now. When they'd come to Grant City it had been a pleasant, babbling brook.

The road lifted after they'd crossed the bridge, and she was following the stage road to Red Rock now, a hot, dusty, empty road. She had an umbrella opened and lashed to the seat, giving her some protection from the sun, but the heat was still stiffling until she reached the top of the grade where there was a little breeze.

She wondered how many people had watched her ride out of Grant City, and what they were saying, but she didn't care today. She was in a rebellious mood.

On the other side of the grade, the old stage road to Boswell led through a break in the hills. She'd been up this road a number of times with Thomas on Sunday afternoon drives, and they'd both liked the ride immensely. It was untraveled, since Boswell, thirty miles to the west, was a ghost town. Moving up the old road four or five miles, they could swing down through a trace which had formerly been part of the Bar M range, and enter Grant City from the east, very close to the church and the parsonage.

The hills closed around her after she'd gone two hundred yards up the old road. The road dipped down into a dry creek bed which had been a fording place, and then lifted into the brown hills to the west. She could smell the sage as she entered the hills. It was strong and spicy, so unlike the smells of the New Hampshire countryside.

It was much cooler here than it had been in town. Grant City was in a hollow among the hills, and only at night, when the sun had gone down, did a little breeze come.

Off to the west she could see the snow-capped ridges of the Paramount Range, and the snow on the mountains had a cooling effect on her. That was when she heard the second buckboard rolling along behind her. She'd been hearing the noise for some time, but only vaguely ,and it had sounded like the echo of her own rig and horse.

Even before she turned her head suddenly to look, she knew who it was. He wore the same black, flat-crowned hat, the same black, broadcloth coat, and even with the dust of her buckboard boiling up behind her, drifting back toward his rig two hundred yards to the rear, she felt that none of the dust would touch Dallas Overmire. He was a man immune to dust.

She felt herself grow suddenly weak, and she resisted the wild impulse to snatch up the whip and start beating the old gray in a frenzy of fear. The gray plodded along in the dust, calm and stolid, as emotionless as the hills on either side.

Martha Truesdale sat on the seat, holding the reins, her slender body swaying with the movement of the buckboard. There was rosy color in her face, though no one was close enough to see it.

She listened for the buckboard behind her, thinking once that it was coming closer, and her throat went dry. When the stage road lifted and swung a little to the north, she was able to glance back without actually turning her head. Dallas Overmire's buckboard was in the same position, some two hundred yards to the rear, and she knew then that he was not going to overtake her. He would stay where he was, that cool smile on his brown face, waiting for her to make the first move, probably confident that she would.

A wave of anger swept over her. She was not a girl from the Roseland Dance Hall; she was the Reverend Thomas Truesdale's wife. No man, especially a man of Dallas Overmire's calibre, should have the temerity to assume that she would stop and dally with him.

Red-faced, Martha drove on, lips tight, and she could hear Overmire's buckboard swinging along behind as they rattled down a grade. They were moving toward a grove of willows under which she and Thomas had stopped many times to breathe the horse. Earlier in the summer there was a stream of water here, the upper waters of Coroner Creek, but it, too, was dry now.

The grove was about fifty yards off the road, and a buckboard could not be seen in the grove, even if someone by chance did happen to be moving along the highway.

Imperceptibly, as the buckboard came abreast of the grove, Martha had pulled in on the reins, the gray slowing down, and then realizing what she was doing, she yanked the whip out of the holder and struck the animal lightly several times, sending him into a startled trot.

The remainder of the drive was a nightmare. She sat there on the seat, stiff and tense, feeling the strain of it, listening to that moving rig behind her, hearing it coming and coming and coming. She tried to analyze her feelings, to account for the slowing down near the grove, but she couldn't do it honestly. Her mind kept veering away from the truth.

She was ready to cry when the gray automatically turned into the Bar M trace and headed back toward Grant City. She didn't know when Overmire's buckboard stopped, but she noticed that when she was within a half mile of town she no longer heard it.

By this time she had the gray moving at a sharp trot, and the buckboard came in to Grant City with the gray puffing. Martha Truesdale turned into the driveway behind the church, pulling up in front of the wagon shed.

She almost stumbled into the house as Ben Schiller came out to unhitch the horse. When she got inside, she down down limply on a chair in the kitchen.

It was still hot and stuffy in the room, but the shadows were lengthening in the yard, and the leaves of the cottonwood were beginning to rustle a little as the breeze came down from the Paramount Range.

She ought to start supper for herself, but she wasn't hungry. She discovered suddenly that she was very dry, and she went over to the sink to get a dipper of water.

SHE THOUGHT of Dallas Overmire lounging out in front of the Cattleman's Bar at this hour, still cool and clean. She could picture him smiling with a confidence he had no right to feel, because Thomas would be coming home tomorrow afternoon.

The clock was ticking in the kitchen, and she sat there with the light failing in the room. Then she heard the knock on the door. For one wild, fearful moment she thought it was Overmire himself, standing out in front

brazenly knocking on her door, but it was only a boy from the telegraph office.

He brought a wire from Red Rock, from Thomas. Martha thanked the boy and closed the door. She came back to the sofa and sat down limply. In the dim light she could scarcely make out the words. It was a brief message from Thomas. He would have to remain in Red Rock another day. He'd been called upon to conduct the funeral services for a rancher up above Red Rock who'd died the previous evening. It meant that he wouldn't be back till the following afternoon.

Martha let the slip of paper fall into her lap. It meant that she'd have another long day ahead of her tomorrow, an empty day, a day of waiting, of heat, of—of temptation.

She had to concede that much now. It had been a temptation, and she'd been tempted. Dallas Overmire had seen her ride past the saloon, and later he'd come after her with his own buckboard, probably taking a back road out of town so that no one would know he'd gone riding, too.

As she sat there she felt the excitement beginning to rise in her, and the terrible shame following the thoughts which came to her mind. She got up hastily, suddenly realizing that she was sitting in a darkened house, and that that itself was sufficient to start rumors flying in a town like this.

She lighted the lamp in the parlor and another one in the kitchen, and then she flew about the room making her belated supper. She cooked potatoes and she fried veal chops. She even baked an apple pie with the dried apples she found in the closet, and when it was all done she had no appetite. She toyed with the food as she sat at the table in the kitchen. She didn't even cut into the pie.

At breakfast the next morning it was the same thing. She'd gone through a sleepless night, and she had no appetite. Already at nine o'clock in the morning, she could feel the heat beginning to build up on the east side of the house.

She worked in the garden behind the wagon shed till about noon. Constantly she found herself thinking about Dallas Overmire. If he expected her to go riding again that afternoon, he was insane.

But the thought persisted, and she had a picture of him in the back room of the Cattleman's Bar, playing cards by himself, smiling, and waiting, confident.

She hated him for his confidence; she hated him because of his good looks and his fine clothes. She wished she were a thousand miles from Grant City.

At noon she ate a light lunch left over from the supper of the night before, and then after washing the dishes she tried to take a nap. The rooms were becoming hotter all the time. She lay there, staring up at the ceiling, thinking of him waiting. He was a fool.

At two o'clock she got up, and went into the kitchen. She had a drink of water, and she could hear old Ben Schiller fussing around out in the shed. She stood by the door, her eyes closed, and then suddenly she flung open the door and called, "Ben!"

"Yes, ma'am," Ben said. He came out of the shed, an old harness in his hands.

"I'm going for a ride, Ben," Martha Truesdale said slowly. "Will you bring the buckboard around."

It did not sound like her own voice. She stood there, gripping the door sills with both hands, steadying herself. "I'm going for a ride, Ben," she said.

WHEN she stepped up to the seat she said to herself that it was just a ride. She was having hallucinations regarding Dallas Overmire. She hadn't waited for him yesterday, so he wouldn't bother following her today. He probably wouldn't notice that she left town. She could even go in the opposite direction today, driving past the church, taking the Bar M trace up to the old stage road, and then heading east. She wouldn't have to pass the Cattleman's Bar then, and he wouldn't know that she'd gone driving.

She told herself she would do that, but when the gray rolled the buckboard out of the driveway, the reins loose in her hands, the animal swung left automatically, taking her through town, and she sat there, making no effort to turn the rig.

He was standing out in front of the saloon when they went past. He had his left shoulder up against one of the porch uprights, and a long, slender cigar in his mouth. His hands

were hooked in his vest pockets, and his flat-crowned hat was pulled low over his eyes.

She didn't look at him as she drove past, but she saw him, tall and dark and immaculate. The Reverend Thomas Truesdale was short and light, and his clothes never did fit him well.

Then she was out of town, rolling across the bridge, taking the grade beyond, and she kept telling herself that he would not come, that he could not come.

She turned the gray into the old stage road, and she was no sooner in among the hills that she found herself listening for an oncoming buckboard. She hated herself for it, but there was nothing she could do. There was no way in which she could shut out sounds from her ears.

He wasn't coming, though. She could hear nothing, but the steady clump of the gray's hoofs in the sand, and the grinding and creaking of her own buckboard.

She was within a half mile of the clump of willows off the road when she heard him coming. He was moving up quite fast in the buckboard, no longer content to remain behind.

She didn't look around. She sat there, holding the reins loosely in her hands, heart pumping, sick at her own weakness. She should have lifted the whip from the holder and urged the gray onward, but she didn't. Why, she thought, I'm no better than the percentage girls who work in the Grant City saloons!

The buckboard behind her drew closer. She was abreast of the clump of willows now, and she could see the wheel tracks in the sand leading to the grove, tracks made by her own buckboard with Thomas in it when they'd come here two weeks before. She thought of Thomas, then, up in Red Rock, a wedding yesterday, a funeral today, sick calls tomorrow, going about his work. He was not a great preacher, and he would never fill a big city pulpit, but he was liked here in Grant City.

The thought of Thomas brought strength to her. She could not deliberately destroy what he was building in this dry and dusty land. She had to stand with him, to face the evil the way he faced it, and to drive it to cover. Then the great biblical truth came to her, that you could not run from evil. You had to face it, and when you faced it, it fled away.

She stopped the buckboard and she sat there, looking down at the wheel tracks in the dust, and she heard the other buckboard come abreast and stop. Then she turned her head and looked at him steadily, calmly, joy sweeping through her because she had won her fight.

The first thing she noticed about him was that there was dust on his coat and his hat, which made him a man and not a devil in the flesh. He sat on the seat, shoulders hunched a little, a faint smile in his fine dark eyes.

Martha Truesdale said quietly, "Were you following me, Mr. Overmire?"

He nodded slightly, calmly. "Reckon I was, ma'am," he stated. He was not ashamed of it.

Martha's eyes started to flash and her lips tightened. "And you followed me yesterday, Mr. Overmire," she said stiffly.

Dallas Overmire shook his head. "Not yesterday, ma'am," he said in that soft voice. "I was heading up to the Donovan place off the Bar M trace. Reckon that's what I wanted to talk to you about this afternoon, Mrs. Truesdale."

Martha Truesdale started to relax a little on the seat. The tension went out of her body. She said slowly, "You wanted to talk to me?"

He nodded, his eyes staring down the dusty road for a moment. "Joe Donovan's a nester," he explained, "a small rancher on Elder Creek, a mile north of the Bar M trace. His wife died last spring before you came here, ma'am. Joe's been raising his four kids alone. Now he's sick and broke and he needs help. I've been bringing him grub."

She noticed for the first time the bulging burlap bag on the floor of the buckboard behind him.

"The oldest child," Dallas Overmire was saying thoughtfully, "is nine. She's doing what she can, but she's not a woman. Joe needs a woman out there till he gets back on his feet. I had Doc Wilton go out this morning, and I told the Doc I'd see if I could find somebody who could stop in once in a while to see how they're making out." He paused and he frowned a little. "Reckon I'm asking too much, ma'am," he finished.

"Take me to them," Martha Truesdale told him.

Thirty minutes later the two buckboards pulled in under the cottonwoods which surrounded the Donovan shack. It was a miserable place, a few acres of tiled land along a nearly dried-up creek. The windows had oiled paper tacked across them. A handful of scrawny chickens scratched in the yard in front of the house, and the four skinny, unwashed children stood near the door watching them silently.

"You know Mr. Donovan well?" Martha asked slowly as Dallas Overmire helped her from the seat.

"Joe's been around town," the gambler said. "He's a square shooter, but he's run into trouble."

Martha started to walk toward the children, toward the smallest one, a boy of about two, tow-headed, holding his thumb in his mouth.

She said to the gambler who came after her, the burlap bag over his shoulder, "Are there many other people in this condition, Mr. Overmire?"

"Half a dozen families up along Stone Creek," the gambler told her. "None of them as bad as this, but it's a tough country. Women get sick or they have babies. Men folk are too busy scratching the land, making a living, to look after them."

Martha Truesdale dropped to her knees in front of the smallest child. A faint, shy smile came to the boy's face. She looked at him through a mist of tears, and she saw her work in this country. She saw that she was badly needed.

Behind her, Dallas Overmire said softly, "Reckon I'll go in and see Joe, ma'am."

THE RIDE home at dusk was a strange experience. She drove alone, following Bar M trace, Dallas Overmire taking the stage road back to town. He didn't say why, but both of them knew. He didn't want to embarrass her by riding into Grant City at night, coming from the same direction she had come.

As he helped her up to the seat, she said to him quietly, "I'm afraid I've misjudged you, Mr. Overmire. I owe you an apology."

The gambler shrugged. That little smile again played around the corners of his mouth. He said, "Reckon I owe you one, too, ma'am. Didn't figure you'd come when I asked you."

The ride back was different. Her mind was filled with the things she had to do. She had to collect clothing; she had to find women who would be willing to help her. Men like Washbon Briggs would donate money for the serious cases. The help would come if the need was pointed out.

Pinpoints of stars were dimpling the deep purple of the sky when she drove the buckboard up to the shed behind the parsonage. She noticed that the harsh lines of the countryside softened as the sun went down. The breeze was coming up from the Paramount Range, and the air was cool. The lethargy which had gripped her for days in this terrible heat was gone. She felt fresh and strong.

Old Ben Schiller said to her, as he stepped around the corner of the shed, "Ain't safe fer a woman to be ridin' around alone like that, Mrs. Truesdale." Disapproval was in his voice.

Martha Truesdale smiled in the darkness. "It's safe, Ben," she murmured. "Quite safe."

from all of us...

A Very Merry Christmas

and a Happy New Year

to all of you!

# WHOM SHALL I MARRY?

## by Professor MARCUS MARI

### THE SAGITTARIUS MAN
### NOV. 23 to DEC. 21

AMONG the many historic events which took place when the Sun was transiting Sagittarius was the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773. The determined wrath of the colonists that night, when they emptied into the harbor the tea shipments they believed to be unfairly taxed, typifies the decisive qualities of the Sagittarius personality, once Sagittarius knows he is in the right.

Fair, just, generous, kind, considerate, with a wide view of life and people, Mr. Sagittarius can easily become annoyed with people who do not live up to his ideals. He often appears to be cool and collected on the surface, when actually he is seething inside. He will permit a great many liberties—until that final straw breaks the camel's back.

His wife and children usually learn early in the game how far they can go in taking advantage of his jovial disposition. Sir Sagittarius wants things to run smoothly in his home. He will work long hard hours to see his family is provided for.

In marriage, he prefers warmth and understanding rather than beauty. He likes an entertaining wife with a good sense of humor, a woman who can make light of trifling annoyances. He enjoys comfort and a certain amount of luxury. He likes to travel in style. He takes his marriage vows seriously, and feels that he is part of a team.

Throughout his life, he has required a certain amount of freedom and independence, and he is fair enough to allow others the same amount of say. It is important that his wife take good care of her health, however.

Aries women intrigue him with their innovation. Gemini women make ideal wives for Sagittarius because they share his love of small talk. Libra women understand his appreciation of nature and respond to his jovial ways. Aquarius women know and admire his justice.

You may receive a personal reading by sending this coupon to Professor Mari in care of Ranch Romances, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. ENCLOSE STAMPED AND SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE. (Canadians enclose three cents instead of stamp.)

Name ..... Sex .....

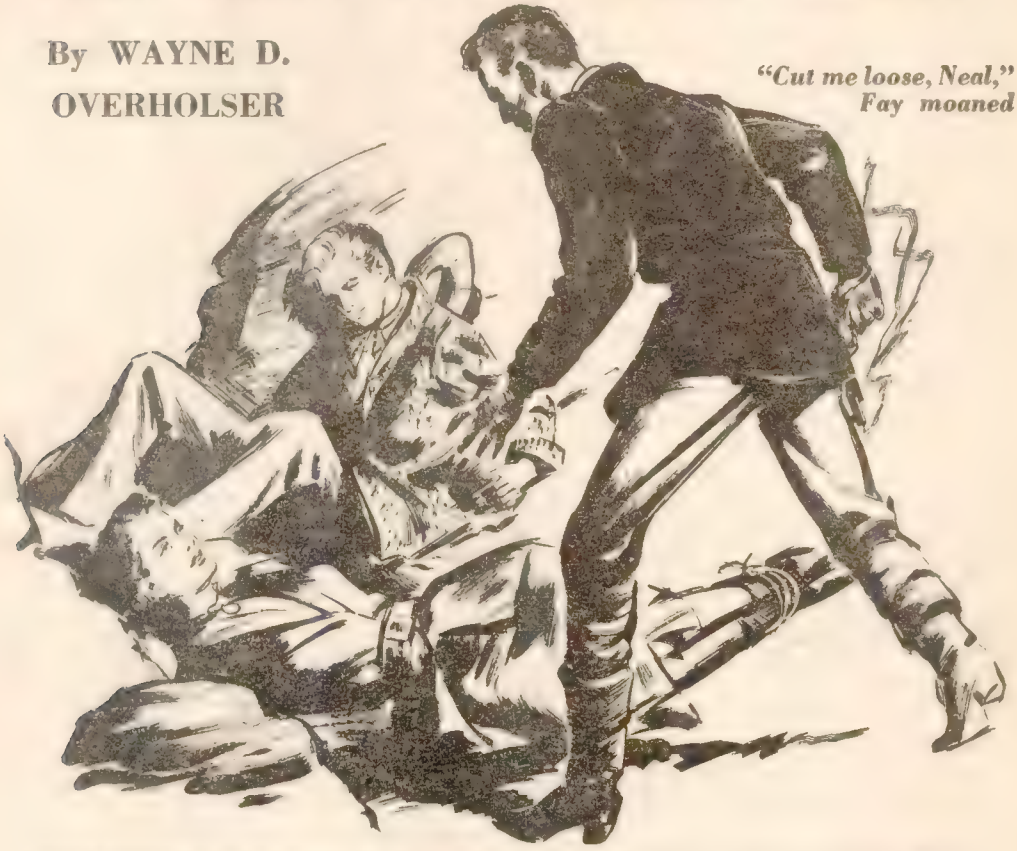
Address .....

.....

Exact date of birth: Year..... Month..... Date of Month..... 12-14-56

# THE MAN FROM YESTERDAY

By WAYNE D. OVERHOLSER



*"Cut me loose, Neal," Fay moaned*

**THE STORY SO FAR:** Banker NEAL CLARK's protests against the phony irrigation scheme started by BEN DARLEY and TUCK SHELTON ruins their chances of getting people to invest in it. Darley and his woman, FAY, run away, and Neal, SHERIFF JOE ROLFE, and DOC SANTEE chase them. Neal is troubled by the fact that he had been receiving letters threatening his wife JANE and his daughter LAURIE. Though the letters were signed by ED SHELLY, an enemy from Neal's past, he thinks they were written by Shelton to frighten him out of town. When Neal learns that Shelton is not with Darley, he is frantic with worry. Meanwhile Shelton has forced his way into Neal's home, and is keeping Neal's brother, PAUL, Jane, Laurie, and Paul's fiancee, VICKY—who had been working with Darley till she realized he was a crook—captive. Shelton tells them he won't harm them till Neal returns—unless they try to escape.

## CONCLUSION

NEAL realized he had made a mistake the instant he was in the open, with bullets kicking up geysers of dirt all around him. He was a perfect target for Darley. A slug sliced through his pants just above the knee and raised a painful welt along his thigh. Another cut through his left boot above his ankle. Then, halfway to the top, he dived headlong to one side, gaining the protection of a low ridge of rock.

He lay on his belly, sucking in great gulps of air. Both Joe Rolfe and Doc Santee had opened up from the other side of the road, Rolfe nearly to the top of the ridge, Santee about halfway up. Now the firing stopped.

One moment he was telling himself he was

lucky to be alive, the next moment he knew he couldn't go on lying here. He tried to assure himself that Rolfe and Santee were working around on the other side of Darley to get the man boxed. Logic was one thing, but lying here and thinking about what might be happening to Jane and Laurie was another. He couldn't wait; he had to do something.

Carefully he wormed his way to the end of the ledge, pulled his gun and eared back the hammer. He eased his gun around the rock and threw a quick shot in Darley's general direction, then jerked his hand back.

Darley answered the shot immediately, his bullet kicking up dust a few inches from where Neal's hand had been. Rolfe and Santee cut loose again. Neal couldn't pinpoint their positions, but judging from the sound of the firing, he was convinced they had not moved up.

Neal glanced at the sun. Time he was moving in. It would be dark soon, and Darley would make a break for it then. That was a chance Neal refused to take. But if he lunged into the open again, he'd get hit. Darley would expect him to show up from the dust he'd just fired from. If he went the other way, he'd have a better chance, with Darley a poor shot and having slow reactions.

Slow reactions! Neal considered that a moment, thinking of the way the man had fought the day before in his office. He wasn't a driver. He'd landed one good punch, but he hadn't followed up.

This was the only angle he could think of, the best slim chance for escape. Quickly Neal slid his hand back to the end of the ledge, pulled himself up on one hand as high as he could without exposing his back, and fired.

He came upright like a jack-in-the-box, whirled, and dived toward another ledge farther up the hill and closer to the road. Darley fired as Neal had been sure he would, and fired again just as Neal gained his new position, the bullet striking a corner of the rock.

Rolfe came running in along the lip of the rim. Darley, his attention on Neal, didn't see him until he fired, and in that same instant Neal and Santee charged Darley's position, Neal angling slightly to the right and Santee crossing the road and coming in from the opposite direction.

Rolfe had the longest way to come. He was zigzagging, bending low, shooting steadily as he ran. Darley fired at him, and that gave Neal the small advantage of time he needed. He was the closest. Before Darley could turn his gun on him, Neal took a long jump to the top of one of the rocks that hid Darley. He fired and missed, and Darley threw a shot just as Santee cut loose, the doctor's bullet raking Darley along the side. It was enough to throw him off.

Darley had one chance at Neal and missed, but this time Neal's bullet didn't miss. He caught Darley in the chest, knocking him against the rock behind him. His feet slid out from under him and he sat down, his gun dropping from his hand.

"Got him," Neal called.

He saw Fay Darley, lying on her back in the bottom of the hole, her hands and feet tied, a dark streak of dried blood on her forehead and down one side of her face.

"Cut me loose, Neal," Fay moaned. "He slugged me with a gun barrel and tied me up."

Neal holstered his gun, and jerking out his pocket knife, cut the ropes that held the woman. Darley wasn't dead, but he was going fast. Neal whirled on him, demanding, "Where is Shelton?"

"Go to hell," Darley said.

Santee jumped down into the hole beside Neal and squatting beside the wounded man, opened his shirt and shook his head. "You're finished, Darley. You better talk."

Darley, who had never been a brave man, died like one. He said again, "Go to hell," and fell sideways, blood trickling down his chin.

Neal helped Fay to her feet. She leaned against a rock, and put a hand to her forehead, muttering, "My head feels like he's still hitting me."

ROLFE holstered his gun, and when he had climbed to the top of the rock, he held his hand to her. Neal gave her a boost out of the hole and she stood beside Rolfe, swaying uncertainly until Neal scrambled up beside her and put an arm around her. Rolfe slid off the other side of the rock and helped her down.

Neal said. "Where's Shelton?"

"In town." Fay's knees gave and she sat down, her back against the rock. "We've got the money. It's in the saddle bags." She motioned toward a clump of junipers where their horses were tied. "We were headed for the lakes. Shelton was going to meet us there. I didn't know why he stayed in town until after we left."

Fay closed her eyes wearily before she went on. "I tried to help," she said. "I wanted you to catch us. I couldn't let Shelton go ahead with what he'd planned. After we left town, I saw Manion and I shot at him. He went after you, didn't he?"

"That's right," Rolfe said.

"Jud took you for Shelton," Neal said.

"I was riding Shelton's horse," she said. "That was why. He was a long way off. I don't think Shelton intended to meet us at the lakes. He wanted us out of town, thinking Rolfe would chase us. This whole swindle was Shelton's idea in the beginning, but I don't think the money was what he wanted any of the time."

"What did he want?" Neal asked.

"Those threatening notes," she went on as if she hadn't heard the question. "I thought they were a bluff. It's like I said yesterday. They were trying to get you out of town so they wouldn't have any trouble with Stacey. They even put Ruggles on you. He was supposed to wound you. That way you'd be home in bed. Shelton wanted you there so he could kill you. He's a crazy man, Neal."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know," Fay said. "Darley met him in Arizona. Darley's always been a promoter of some kind. Or a con man working the mining camps. Shelton told him about this country, the lakes and the high desert, and convinced him he could make a fortune here. That's why we came. At least that's what Darley and I thought, but Shelton had something else in his head. I didn't know what it was, and I don't believe Darley did until the other day. He told me on the way out. I couldn't stand it. When we got here, we stopped to rest our horses. We were on the ground and I shot him in the leg. He slugged me and tied me up. He said he was going to fight it out. He said you men would kill him if you could and he'd bled too much to ride."

"Fay." Neal knelt beside her. "What did he tell you?"

She looked at him, trying to smile. "Funny, isn't it?" she said in a low voice. "Most of the things I said to you weren't lies. I didn't think you'd believe them, but I thought they'd kill you and I wanted to keep them from doing it."

Neal took her hands. "Fay, what did Darley tell you?"

She lifted her head and looked at him earnestly. "Shelton's nursing a grudge against you. He has been for eight years. All he wants is revenge. Turn everybody against you. Hang you maybe. Injure your family. Anything to make you suffer. Even take it out on your little girl. When I heard that, I knew I had to stop Darley. I thought I could ride back and warn you, but he wasn't going to take any chances."

Suddenly Neal was gone, running down the slope toward Redman. Rolfe called, "Wait, Neal. You'll need help."

But Neal seemed not to hear him.

AS NEAL ran down the slope to his horse, he remembered stepping out of Olly Earl's hardware store and shooting the Shelly gang to pieces, with only Ed Shelly escaping. But Tuck Shelton could not be Ed Shelly. Joe Rolfe had proved that to Neal's saitsfaction. Now Fay said Shelton had nursed a grudge against him for eight years. Shelton must, in some way, be tied up with the Shelly outfit. As he rode, the hours and miles falling behind, the hope that had been in him when he left Horse Ridge began to fade until it was no hope at all.

At last he reined his lathered, heaving horse to a stop in front of his house, and he saw that there were lights in Laurie's room and in the parlor.

Neal dismounted and crossed the yard to the porch, moving as silently as he could. He turned the knob, opened the front door and stepped inside. Closing the door, he drew his gun and eased along the hall to the parlor, the floor squeaking under his feet. He had forgotten about the squeaky boards.

He should have gone around to the back. Too late. The parlor door was open and light fell through it into the hall; he could not go

past the door without being seen, if Shelton was in the parlor. But Shelton might be anywhere in the house—even up in Laurie's room with a gun pointed at her head.

Then he heard Shelton's even-toned, monotonous voice, "Come in, Mr. Clark, with your hands up unless you want your brother killed."

Paul sat on the couch, his hands folded on his lap, and in the lamplight his face was shiny with beads of sweat. Shelton stood in the fringe of light, his gun lined on Paul. He did not indicate by even a slight movement of his head that he had seen Neal come in.

"That's fine, Mr. Clark," Shelton said. "I expected obedience from an intelligent man like you. Now lay your gun on the table. Draw up a chair and sit down. If you try to shoot me, I'll kill you and your brother, and everyone else in the house."

"Laurie?" Neal asked.

"She's all right," Paul said.

"So far," Shelton added significantly. "She's in her room. Her mother and Vicky are with her. As a matter of fact, Mr. Clark, I've had a very satisfying evening. When I heard you ride up, that made it perfect."

So he'd known the instant Neal had dismounted in front of the house. It wouldn't have made any difference if he had come in through the back door. Prbably it was locked anyhow. He hesitated, wondering if he had any chance to get his gun into action before Shelton killed him. A slim one, he thought, but it meant throwing Paul's life away, and he couldn't do that. He obeyed Shelton's orders, slowly drawing his gun from holster and laying it on the table. Then he sat down.

"I rode my horse harder than I should have," Neal said. "I'd like for Paul to go out and take care of him."

"A cowman first, a banker second," Shelton said. "All right, Paul, you do that. Rub the horse down. He's a good animal. We've got to take care of him. I'll need him before morning."

Slowly Shelton turned so his gun covered Neal. Paul rose, glancing at Neal as if trying to read his mind. Here was their chance, Neal thought, and Paul would take advantage of it. He could move the ladder that leaned against the back of the house and put it to Laurie's window. They could escape, Laurie and Vicky and Jane. Neal was a hostage, but that didn't make any difference. He was a dead man anyway.

Neal nodded, and Paul started toward the dining room. He reached it just as Shelton said, "Go out through the front door, Paul, and walk around the house. Leave the back door locked."

Shelton was silent until Paul reached the hall door, then he laughed. It was the first time, Neal thought, that he had ever heard the man laugh, an odd sound that broke out of him suddenly and was gone as quickly as it came, leaving no lingering trace of humor on the man's mouth.

"You're a pair of fools, Clark," Shelton said. "I know what you're thinking. He'll ride that horse down town and get help. Or find a gun. Or get back into the house through a window and surprise me. All right, Paul, you try it. If you do, there are two women and a kid upstairs who'll die, but if do what I tell you, they won't get hurt." He nodded viciously at Neal. "There's the man I want, not the women or the kid or you, Paul. Savvy that?"

"I savvy," Paul said.

"I'll give you fifteen minutes," Shelton said. "You'd better be damned sure you're back here by that time."

Paul left the room. When the door closed, Shelton said, "I reckon you caught up with Darley and his woman."

"On Horse Ridge. Darley's dead," Neal said, and told him what had happened.

SHELTON shrugged. "Darley was the kind of man I needed in most ways, but he lacked guts. I'm surprised he forted up that way. He wouldn't have if she hadn't shot him, and he figured you'd never fetch him back alive." Shelton turned his head and spit in contempt at the fireplace. "Women! What good are they? It was Darley's idea fetching 'em here. Now Vicky sells us out and Darley's woman shoots him because she's worried about you and your kid. I figured she was too smart to be soft."

"Maybe she's human," Neal said.

"Meaning I'm not? You're right, but you made me what I am. You're to blame, Clark. If your wife and kid get hurt, you're to

blame. For eight years I haven't wanted to do anything but get you and make you suffer. I have, haven't I?"

"You know you have," Neal said.

Shelton sat down, the gun dangling between his legs. "This is just a beginning. Now you're going to know why. This is what I've been waiting for, Clark. I've lived this moment a million times, dreaming about how I'd be sitting here just like I am now and telling you what you did eight years ago. Listen carefully, because you haven't got long to listen to anything." His eyes gleamed vindictively as he said, "If you're thinking of that .22 in the pantry, you can quit. Or your .38 that was upstairs. I found them both."

Shelton was sitting so he could watch the stairs as well as Neal, but the hall at the head of the stairs was dark. Neal had been hoping Jane would get the .38 and shoot at Shelton. She wasn't much good with a gun, but it would give him a chance to try for his own on the table. Now even that slender thread of hope was broken.

"I'm listening," Neal said.

"You've been wondering if Ed Shelly was around here, haven't you?" Shelton asked. "And you've wondered what I had to do with him. You and Rolfe scratched around trying to figure it out—the notes and Ruggles being here and who I was. The name Shelton's purty close to Shelly, ain't it?"

Neal nodded. "I'm still listening."

"Well, when you shot the Shelly outfit, you made the biggest mistake a man ever made. My name is Tuck Shelly. I took the shot at you last night and missed on purpose. I hired Ruggles to come here and shoot you. Not bad. Just enough to lay you up so you'd be here when I wanted you. I missed on that. Ruggles wasn't as good with his gun as he was supposed to be."

Neal sat with his hand fisted on his lap, knowing Shelton was purposely stringing this out, but not knowing how long he could stand it. "All right, all right," he said. "Let's have the story."

"I've dreamed about this for eight years," Shelton said. "I don't aim to hurry now. I've got to make a few hours do to you what all these years have done to me. I'm Ed Shelly's uncle. I was out there in the desert with my brother and his two boys. I was supposed to help on the holdup, but just before they hit the bank, I sprained my ankle, so Ed took my place. Otherwise you wouldn't be alive today."

Now his voice became high and shrill. "I didn't have any kids of my own. I guess I never loved anybody in my life except Ed Shelly. He looked like me and acted like me and was named after me. When he was little, I took care of him a hell of a lot more'n his dad ever done. Ed's mother died when he was a baby.

"He was just a kid when you killed him. He had no business coming to town, but they had to have someone to hold the horses. You hit him. By the time he got to camp, he'd bled bad. I helped him off his horse and watched him die. From your bullet, Clark."

HE GOT up and walked to Neal. He slapped him with his left hand, the gun gripped in his right, then struck him on the other side of the face, rocking Neal's head.

"I can't hurt you enough, Clark. Not half enough. I watched him die and I couldn't even go for a doctor. I couldn't do anything but watch him die, I tell you. Then I buried him. I sent that note from Salt Lake City so you'd know that sooner or later you'd get it. I spent my time since then thinking about what I'd do to you and who I'd get to help me. Darley was the best I could find.

"Ever since I came here I've watched you. You lost your friends. They even came close to stringing you up, but they didn't, so I figured this was the next best. Get Rolfe chasing after Darley who had the money. Manion seeing them and telling Rolfe was luck. I hadn't counted on that, but I figured somebody would come up and see the safe was cleaned out and guess that Darley had the money."

Neal didn't move, his hands clutched so tightly the knuckles were white. Shelton was a mad man, worse than Neal had dreamed. His face shone with sweat, his eyes were wide and wild, and Neal knew that there was nothing he could say or do that would touch him.

"Get up," Shelton shouted. "By God, you're going to get on your feet and go up-

stairs with me. You'll watch what I'm going to do to your wife and kid."

"You promised," Neal shouted. "You said that if—"

"Promise, you say?" Shelton laughed just as he had before, a laugh that was no real laugh at all. "What's a promise? Nothing, Clark. Nothing! Now get on your feet and start up the stairs."

Neal rose, his gaze fixed on Shelton. The man had no purpose except to torture Neal. That was his reason for sending notes that threatened Jane and Laurie; it was the reason he wanted to make them suffer now.

"I'm not going," Neal said. "Go ahead and shoot me. That's what you want to do, isn't it?"

"No," Shelton shouted angrily. "I told you it wasn't. I'm going to put you through what I went through when Ed died. I won't tell you again. Get up them stairs."

"I'm not going," Neal said again.

This was something Shelton could not comprehend. He stood there, breathing hard. He cocked his gun, aiming it at Neal's chest, then he lowered it and shook his head. "You ain't getting off that easy. We'll wait till Paul gets here."

They were facing each other when Paul came in a moment later. He said, "I wasn't gone more than fifteen minutes. What's the matter with you, Shelton?"

"Nothing's the matter with me." Shelton turned his gun on Paul. "Now, Mr. Clark. You'll go upstairs with me or he gets it. First in the knees. Then both elbows. I won't kill him. He'll live, but he'll never be worth a damn for anything." He paused, then asked, "How about it? Will you go upstairs now?"

"All right," Neal said. "I'll go."

"Hold on," Paul said. "I don't know what you've been talking about, but I had an idea. Shelton, you probably don't know it, but I'm not very fond of my big brother. Neal's always treated me like a damned kid. I don't owe him anything. You promise not to hurt Vicky and I'll make it worth your while."

For a moment Shelton seemed puzzled, then he nodded as if seeing some sense in what Paul said. "I don't care anything about Vicky. What's your idea?"

"You and Darley worked for months to get rich," Paul said. "Now you're walking out empty-handed. No sense in that. You could leave here with your pockets full of Neal's money, and he'd die knowing you were going to have it easy the rest of your life and he was paying for it."

THIS appealed to Shelton. He said to Neal, "Sit down." He scratched an ear thoughtfully. "Having it easy the rest of my life on Clark's money. I like your notion, but just how do you figure to get it?"

"Have Neal write a letter to Henry Abel," Paul said. "Tell him to go to the bank and take what you want from the safe and give it to me. I'll fetch it here to you."

"Abel wouldn't do it," Shelton said. "Or if he did, you'd pull out with the dough."

"He'd do it," Paul said. "I'd see he did if I had to use a gun on him. You know Abel. He's nothing but a damned rabbit. And as for me running out, what do you think I am, with Vicky upstairs?"

Shelton was silent a moment, turning this over in his mind. Finally he said, "All right, I'm not out anything if it doesn't work. Money doesn't mean much to me, if it's just money. But I could have a good time, blowing Clark's money." He motioned to Neal. "Move over to your desk and write to Abel. Ask him for twenty thousand."

Neal had been watching Paul. It could not possibly work. Abel was not likely to give Paul the money, and even if he did, it would take too much time. Shelton was like a clock too tightly wound. He would not sit here for hours waiting for money which he didn't really care about. He would give way to impulse just as he had a few minutes ago. But it might buy some time. Paul must have a plan, or he wouldn't have suggested it.

Neal moved to the desk, and drew paper, pen and ink from a drawer. He wrote, "Dear Henry," then laid the pen down and looked at Shelton. "You want to kill me, I can understand that, but nobody except a crazy man would throw his life away while he's doing it. You aren't crazy, are you, Shelton?"

Shelton swung his gun from Paul to Neal, and for a terrible moment Neal stared at the man, knowing he was close to death.

"Now you listen to me, Shelton," Neal said

grimly. "If you touch my wife or girl, you'll be throwing your life away. You know that, Shelton. Nobody is going to get excited about me getting beefed. Or losing the money. But when you murder a woman or a child, or both, you'll have every man in the county hunting you until they find you.

"I suppose you've got an idea, too," Shelton said.

Neal nodded. "I have. Let Paul come back with the money, then you and I will leave town in my buggy. You can hitch Redman behind. He's the best horse in the county. Take Paul, too, if you want a hostage to keep Rolfe from chasing you. When we get out in the desert you can kill me and be on your way with the money. You hid your tracks eight years ago. I guess you can do it again."

"Sure I can do it, but how come you're so full of ideas when you're the hombre I'm gonna plug whether I do it now or ten hours from now."

"I want to save my wife and girl," Neal said, "just like Paul wants to save Vicky."

Shelton nodded. "Maybe we'll do it your way. Write your letter to Abel."

"I will if you promise to leave here without harming the women or Laurie."

"Sure, I promise," Shelton said.

Neal dipped the pen into the ink bottle and began to write. Certainly a promise meant nothing to Shelton. But if he had any reasoning power left, he would recognize the truth of what Neal had said about a woman killer.

When Neal finished writing, he laid the pen down and picked up the sheet of paper. He read aloud, "Dear Henry, I am sorry to get you out of bed at this time of night, but a situation has arisen which makes it imperative that I have twenty thousand dollars at once. Will you please go to the bank, take that amount from the safe and give it to Paul. He will deliver it to me. Neal."

Shelton took the paper from Neal's fingers and read it. "That should do it," he said. "It's up to you." He nodded at Paul as he handed him the note. "You know what will

[*Continued on page 108*]

ADVERTISEMENT

# Do We Have To Die?

Forty-three years ago in forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young journalist named Edwin J. Dingle found the answer to this question. A great mystic opened his eyes. A great change came over him. He realized the strange power that knowledge gives.

That Power, he says, can transform the life of anyone. Questions, whatever they are, can be answered. The problems of health, death, poverty and wrong can be solved.

In his own case, he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as world-wide professional recognition. Forty-three years ago, he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back home to die, when a strange message came—"They are waiting for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there, under the guidance of the greatest mystic he ever encountered during his lifetime of travel throughout the world. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power, which there came to him.

Within ten years, he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the world's leading geographical societies, for his work as a geographer. And today, 43 years later, he is still so athletic capable of so much work, so young in appearance, it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send to readers of this paper a 9,000-word treatise. He says the time is here for it to be released to the Western World, and offers to send it, free of cost or obligation to sincere readers of this notice. In addition he will give to each of them a 64-page book showing the astonishing events the world may soon expect, according to great prophecies.

For your free copy of both works, simply send a postcard or letter to The Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. A-569, Los Angeles 4, Calif.

happen if you don't do exactly what you're told. I think we will take the buggy. You'll come back if no one chases us. If they do, you get it."

Paul folded the paper and slipped it into his pocket. "I'll get back as soon as I can."

"I want to get out of town before sunup," Shelton said. "You know how much time you've got."

"I'll make it," Paul said.

WATCHING him, Neal wondered if he understood. Now that it was too late, he wished he had written the note more carefully, giving it a double meaning with the hope that Abel might catch the warning. But it wasn't necessary. Paul understood, probably better than Neal did because he had lived with terror for hours, long before Neal got here.

Paul left the room. A moment later the front door slammed shut. He'd do something, Neal thought. He'd bring help. Or find a gun. Then he decided Paul would do none of those things. He could have tried when he'd put Redman away, but instead he'd walked right back into the house. He was too much in love with Vicky to take any chances. If anything was done, Neal would have to do it alone. But what could he do in the face of Shelton's gun?

Shelton was watching him with relish. This was probably better than anything he had planned. He wanted Neal to hope, and then have that hope crushed.

"How does it feel, Clark?" Shelton asked.

"Like hell."

"That's the way I want it. I just wish I could make it last for eight years." Shelton motioned toward the hall. "Get up and lock the front door. Move slow. I'll be a few feet behind you."

Neal obeyed. When they were back in the parlor, Shelton drew up a chair and sat down, motioning for Neal to sit on the couch. He said, "He won't go to Abel. You didn't expect him to, did you, Clark?"

"Yes, I think he will."

Shelton shook his head, a tight smile on his lips. "A man in your shape is always looking for a miracle of some kind. It won't happen, Clark. I've lived this too many times. I won't let anything slip. The boy will make a try. I don't know what, but he'll try. Then before I kill him, I'll be damned sure he knows it was his fault. If he'd done what I told him to, he wouldn't have got hurt and his girl wouldn't either."

"Rolfe and Santee will be in town before long," Neal said. "They'll be here."

"Suits me," Shelton said. "They can watch, too. I don't care if I have an audience. Did you think all that hogwash about money meant anything to me? Or about what would happen if I killed a woman?" He shook his head again. "You don't savvy, Clark. You still don't know what you did eight years ago. Getting out of town with my life doesn't mean anything. Squeezing you until you squeal does. You figured you had a chance, didn't you? Figured your money could buy your wife's and kid's lives. It won't. I don't care how Paul plays it, you're coming out the same way. Dead! So's your wife and kid."

Neal couldn't move. He couldn't even think coherently. He was numb. All he could do was wait. If Shelton kept on wildly taunting him this way, he'd lose his self-control and rush the man and get killed. No, he had to wait, just on the slim chance that Paul was able to think of something that would work.

Shelton opened his mouth and closed it, his head cocked a little. There was a sound outside, a faint sound that Neal could not identify. It might have been the wind in the pines or around the eaves. It might have been someone outside the house. Paul maybe. Or Rolfe and Santee.

"Somebody's out there," Neal said. "Rolfe and Santee could be back by now."

Shelton rose, the click of his gun being cocked a warning of death. "I don't know what it was, mister," he said, "but you'd better pray it's not what you're hoping it is."

SHELTON remained motionless for several minutes, the clock on the mantel ticking the seconds off with slow monotony. Then, apparently decided it had been the wind, he sat down, his eyes on Neal, his gun on his lap.

Again the minutes dragged by. Neal wondered if Shelton actually saw him. The man's eyes had been riveted on him from the time

he'd first sat down, but there was something strange about them, as if he were so lost in the past that the present had ceased to exist.

Neal's gun was still on the table. Shelton had probably left it there for bait, giving Neal another thin hope that would be crushed when it suited Shelton's fancy. Now Neal's hand began slowly edging toward the gun.

"Stop it," Shelton said. "I ain't ready to kill you yet. Don't make me." He got up and began walking around the room, suddenly restless. "I don't know if I'm going to wait or not. Nothing's important to me but you and I've got you. Why should I wait for twenty thousand dollars? Hell, I'd have played this different if the money was what I wanted."

Neal couldn't tell from the man's tone or words if he meant what he said, but he did have the impression that suddenly Shelton was indecisive. Maybe the money was more of a temptation than he wanted Neal to think.

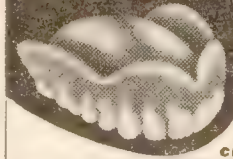
Shelton stopped his pacing and swung around to stand in front of Neal, then he began pacing again. Watching him, Neal thought he understood. Shelton had spent eight years planning for this, relishing in anticipation his revenge upon the man he hated. Now that he had reached the end of the game, he didn't know how to extract the greatest pleasure from his vengeance. Anticipation usually gave more satisfaction than realization, Neal knew, and Shelton was vaguely disappointed now that his triumph had come.

Shelton came back and sat down. "I was a black one by Bill's lights. He was my brother. I was younger'n he was, and smarter. All he knew was to take what he wanted by force. Me, I saw easier ways. His wife died when Ed was little. That's why I raised him. Bill was too ornery to take care of his own kid. Ed never gave a damn for his old man, but he liked me.

"I didn't want Ed to go bad. We kept him straight for a long time. Had him in school and he didn't even know what we were. Then Bill said he was going to make a man out of him or kill him doing it. That's what he did, with your bullet. I don't care anything about you killing Bill. Or his other boy. They had it coming. Sooner or later I'd have done it

[*Turn page*]

COMPLETE New FALSE PLATE IN 24 HOURS FROM YOUR OLD



NOW LOW AS... $15.95*

*Brand new process transforms your old, broken, cracked or loose plates into new lightweight plastic plates.*

NO IMPRESSION NEEDED

Let us help you enjoy life again. You will marvel at this revolutionary new method. Using your own old plates, we will remake them completely in only 24 hours. Missing teeth are carefully matched and replaced. Work is done on an absolute MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.

SEND NO MONEY —Just rush your name and address to us for full FREE DETAILS. If your teeth are loose, we'll tell you how to tighten them before duplication. Act now. Quit suffering!

Tru-Grip Dental Labs. 7th Fl., 127 N. Dearborn St. Dept. F-1, Chi. 2, Ill.

Shrinks Hemorrhoids New Way Without Surgery

Science Finds Healing Substance That Relieves Pain—Shrinks Hemorrhoids

For the first time science has found a new healing substance with the astonishing ability to shrink hemorrhoids and to relieve pain – without surgery.

In case after case, while gently relieving pain, actual reduction (shrinkage) took place.

Most amazing of all – results were so thorough that sufferers made astonishing statements like "Piles have ceased to be a problem!"

The secret is a new healing substance (Bio-Dyne*)—discovery of a world-famous research institute.

This substance is now available in *suppository* or *ointment form* under the name *Preparation H.** Ask for it at all drug counters—money back guarantee. *Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

FREE—Amazing Book on RHEUMATISM, ARTHRITIS

If you suffer aches, pains and discomforts of Rheumatism, as manifested in ARTHRITIS, NEURITIS, SCIATICA or LUMBAGO, send today for this FREE Book. It reveals important facts about why drugs and medicine give only temporary relief without removing cause. Explains a proven, specialized system of treatment that may save you years of distress. No obligation. Write for this FREE Book today!

BALL CLINIC, DEPT. 504, EXCELSIOR SPRINGS, MO.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

If you did not or cannot finish high school, here is your opportunity. Study in spare time at home. Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to residential school—prepares for college exams. Standard texts supplied. Credit for subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. Diploma awarded. Be a High School graduate. Start studies now. Free Bulletin. Write today.

AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. H158

Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37, Illinois

if you hadn't, but you made a mistake when you shot Ed."

Shelton got up and begn walking around the room once more, impelled by a nervousness he had not shown before. Neal did not understand why Shelton felt this need to talk, to expalin to the man he was determined to kill. So he waited, motionless, his hands on his thighs, waited with the hope still alive that something would happen which might give him a chance to try for the gun on the table.

"I told you Ed was like me. I loved him. I never loved anybody else before or afterwards. I told you I watched him die, by inches, out there in a dirty dry camp in the desert, and I couldn't do a damned thing. I couldn't move him. I couldn't leave him to go after a doctor. I didn't have the right grub for him. When he died, I died too. You killed him, and by doing that, you killed me, but you didn't kill me dead. That was your mistake. You should have used a bullet on me."

Shelton turned to the table, picked up Neal's gun, and slipped it under his waistband. Neal started to get up and then dropped back. The gun was his last chance. But it had never really been a chance, just a symbol. Shelton stared down at Neal, his opaque eyes as expressionless as ever.

It seemed to Neal that Tuck Shelton was an automaton, driven by this wild, unchanging desire to take a life in exchange for the life Neal had taken eight years ago. He was at least partly right in saying he had died when Ed Shelly had died. But what was the reason for the sudden restlessness, this indecision?

Neal rose, his muscles tense. He was not more than ten feet from Shelton. He had no chance to cover that distance before Shelton shot him, but there could be salvation in death. Shelton might get panicky and leave. The only reason he had for killing Laurie and the women was to make Neal suffer. So, if he was already dead, there might be a chance for the others.

Shelton backed away. He said, "I ain't waiting for that money. You're gonna harness your mare. We'll take the buggy and hitch your horse on behind. Got a lantern?"

Neal nodded. He thought he knew what had brought on Shelton's indecision. He had been weighing the money against his safety. He wasn't as ready to die as he pretended. Neal said, "The lantern's in the barn."

"We'll go out through the back," Shelton said. "Maybe I'll get the kid after we—"

"Don't forget what I told you," Neal said. "About what will happen to you if you kill a woman or a child."

Shelton swore. "Shut up." He motioned toward the dining room. "Move."

TIME had run out. Shelton would not, perhaps could not, wait any longer. Neal started toward the dining room, Shelton keeping him covered. It would be dark in the kitchen. And on the back porch. Neal might have a chance if the darkness was complete enough to cover his movements. He'd whirl and rush Shelton, dropping below the gun....

Just as he reached the dining room, Shelton said, "I've changed my mind. We'll take the kid now. I'll hold my gun on her head. If you try anything, or if she starts bawling, she gets a bullet."

Neal turned, the terrible, deadening thought in him that once more the thin hope he had briefly nursed had withered and died. With Laurie in Shelton's arms, he was helpless. If they left town, Shelton would see that neither returned. He might kill Neal and leave the child to die on the desert.

"I'll go with you," Neal said, "but I won't take Laurie."

There was no indecision in Shelton now. He said, "You won't tell me what I'm going to do or what you're going to do. I've made up my mind. That twenty thousand looked good for awhile, but it was a trap. We're getting out. You'll do what I tell you or—"

A woman screamed from upstairs. Laurie's room. Shelton started to turn, then stopped, his gun still on Neal. "What the hell's the matter with them? I told them I couldn't stand yelling women."

Neal had no idea what had happened. He heard the scream again. Jane? No, it was two voices. Both women.

Shelton swore. "I'll shut 'em up for good, Clark. Get upstairs. Not fast. Just keep a step ahead of me."

The screams had been wordless sounds. Now both women were shrieking, "Help, Mr. Shelton, help!"

"Why are they hollering at me for help?" Shelton demanded.

"Something's wrong up there," Neal said. "Come on."

Neal started up the stairs, taking two at a time. Shelton called, "Slow up. I don't give a damn what's wrong. Stop! You hear me?"

Neal had reached the hall. Now he paused and looked back. Shelton was halfway up the stairs, irritated and confused because this was something he could not understand.

Now Neal heard Laurie scream, "Mr. Shelton! Help, Mr. Shelton!"

"It's Laurie," Neal shouted. "Shelton, I've never heard her scream like that. I tell you something's wrong."

Shelton took two more steps and paused, still confused. Neal motioned for him to keep going. He still didn't know what was back of the screaming unless the two women hoped to lure Shelton into the room and then swarm all over him the minute he opened the door. It wouldn't work. He'd start shooting. Still, anything was better than going out to the barn with Laurie in Shelton's arms.

Slowly Shelton climbed the rest of the steps, stopping the instant he reached the hall. He said, "Light the wall lamp." The women were screaming again. The last of Shelton's self-control broke. "Shut up," he yelled

Neal got a match out and struck it. As he touched the flame to the wick, he said, "Come on, Shelton. I tell you there's trouble here."

The door of Neal's and Jane's bedroom was open a narrow crack. Neal slipped the chimney into place, staring at the door. Paul! He moved on, hoping his face did not show the sudden flare of hope that was in him. Shelton would have to pass that door to get to Laurie's room.

"Come on," Neal said again.

Shelton strode forward. When he was one step from the door of Neal's and Jane's bedroom. Neal shouted. "Now."

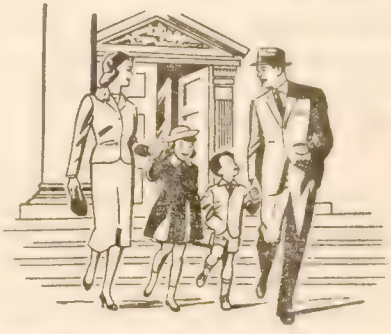
The door slammed open, smashing into Shelton. He stumbled back, grunting, completely surprised because he had been intent on going

[*Turn page*]


# HEARING IMPROVED

**. . . thousands report.** Blessed relief from years of suffering from poor hearing and miserable ear noises, caused by catarrh of the head! That's what these folks (**many past 70**) reported after using our simple Elmo Palliative HOME TREATMENT. **This may be the answer to your prayer. Nothing to wear. Here are SOME of the symptoms that may likely go with your catarrhal deafness and ear noises: Mucus dropping in throat. Head feels stopped up by mucus. Mucus in nose or throat every day. Hear — but don't understand words. Hear better on clear days — worse on rainy days, or with a cold. Ear noises like crickets, bells, whistles, clicking or escaping steam or many others. If your condition is caused by catarrh of the head, you, too, may likely enjoy such wonderful relief as many others have reported during our past 18 years. WRITE TODAY FOR PROOF OF RELIEF AND 30 DAY TRIAL OFFER. THE ELMO COMPANY DEPT. 7TFI DAVENPORT, IOWA**

# Build a stronger richer life...



**WORSHIP TOGETHER EVERY WEEK!**

# BUY U. S. BONDS!

**U. S. SERIES "E" SAVINGS BONDS**

earn interest at an average of 3% per year, compounded semiannually, when held to maturity! And they can go on earning interest for as long as 19 years and 8 months if you wish, giving you back 80% more than you put in!

into Laurie's room. Neal was on him, grabbing for the gun. He missed. Shelton, recovering his balance, raised the gun and brought it down in a vicious, chopping blow on Neal's collar bone. He went to his knees, pain knifing through his shoulder.

DURING the moment that Shelton's attention was fixed on Neal, Paul charged out of the bedroom, head down ramming Shelton in the stomach and driving wind out of him. The gun was knocked from Shelton's hands as he and Paul spilled down the stairs in a wild tangle of arms and legs. They hit the floor, Paul rolling to one side as Shelton yanked Neal's gun out from under his waistband.

Neal lunged forward, reaching for the gun Shelton had dropped. He picked it up just as Shelton, dazed by the fall, threw a slug at him, a wild shot that missed by two feet. Neal had the gun firmly in his grip then. He squeezed off a shot before Shelton could pull the trigger a second time, and fired again, the bullets hammering into Shelton's chest.

The house seemed filled with the deafening echoes of the shots, then there was silence, the hall reeking with the stench of burned powder. Shelton lay on his back, blood bubbling in a scarlet stream from the corners of his mouth, limp hands flung out beside him.

Paul knelt at Shelton's side, felt of his pulse, then looked up at Neal. "He's dead," he said.

"How did you do it?" Neal's voice came out thin and tight, the voice of a stranger. Breathing hard, his left shoulder hurting with excruciating pain, he could not believe it was over at last.

"I got the ladder and put it to Laurie's window," Paul said. "I figured it was a better gamble than going after the money. I didn't think he'd wait. When I came in from putting Redman away, I saw he was awful jumpy. I didn't have time to go after a gun. I told Jane and Vicky what to do, then I got into your bedroom. Their yelling brought him up the stairs like I figured."

Neal threw the gun aside and stood up. He sucked a deep breath into his aching lungs. Rolfe and Santee would be along and folks would hear what had happened. In time everything would be like it was before, except he'd be on the Circle C and Paul would be in the bank, working to turn Tom Clark's dreams into reality. In these last hours Paul had been tested as few men had ever been tested. He had his share of the flint that had been in their father, all that any man would need.

Neal said, "Thanks, Paul."

He walked down the hall. It was finished at last. The man from yesterday was dead.

Paul must have told the women to stay in the room. Now Neal called, "Jane. Vicky." He heard the lock turn and the door flew open. Vicky ran out, calling, "Paul, Paul are you all right?"

"Sure," Paul said. "I'm fine."

Neal walked through the door, moving slowly, his eyes on Jane who sat on the side of the bed holding Laurie on her lap. The child was crying, and when Neal sat down and put a hand on her, he felt her body tremble.

"She's been terribly frightened," Jane said, "but she'll be all right."

"You've been a brave girl," Neal said. "A mighty brave girl. I didn't think you could scream so loud. I heard you clear out in the hall."

She came to him and hugged him, and when she stopped crying, she said, "Vicky told me to. Paul told Vicky what to do."

She would be the first to recover, Neal thought. Tomorrow would be another day, a good day for Vicky's stories and mud pies in the back yard and a candy cane from Harvey Quinn's Mercantile.

Neal looked at Jane, thinking a little good would come of this, that he and Jane would be closer than they had ever been before. He would talk to her about things he had kept to himself, troubles she wanted to share with him. And there was something else he couldn't quite identify, a sort of relief, as if at last he was freed from the hold his father had had upon him.

Then he understood. He, too, had been tested, and he was not ashamed of what he had done through these strained, terrible hours.

He reached out and took Jane's hand. Downstairs someone was hamering on the

front door. He heard Joe Rolfe's shout, "Neal! Neal!"

"I'd better go down and talk to Joe," Neal said. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Jane nodded as he rose. He stood looking down at her and Laurie for a long moment, so many things in his heart he wanted to say. They could wait, but he knew he would say them, later, when the time was right, the sweet things Jane liked to hear. He smiled at her, and turning, walked along the hall and down the stairs.

THE END

## KNOW YOUR WEST

*(Answers to the questions on page 90)*

1. 150 to 200 yards, though much more deadly up to 100.
2. Suspected of being a cow-thief, carrying an easy-to-conceal cinch ring to use as a branding iron.
3. Old-time saloons usually had sawdust on their floors. Hence a man "got sawdust in his beard" if down on a saloon floor, the inference being that he had been shot down.
4. Spurs.
5. Keno.
6. Apples, watermelons, canteloupes, pinon nuts, grasshoppers, green corn, most any chuck wagon scraps, plums, cherries, peaches, even sometimes mushrooms.
7. Oklahoma.
8. Arizona.
9. New Mexico.
10. "Faith."


**PLAY MUSIC AND GO PLACES!**

Life is a thrilling adventure . . . for people who can play! Making your own music on piano, guitar, accordion, etc. chases away boredom and "the blues" . . . brings exciting invitations and job opportunities. Learn right at home, in spare time, our famous A-B-C way. Over 900,000 students. 59th successful year. No teacher or special "talent" needed. No boring exercises. Start playing real pieces—by NOTES. SEND FOR 36-PAGE FREE BOOK about our Courses, methods, results. No obligation. No salesman will call. Mention favorite instrument.

U. S. School of Music, Studio A1441, Port Washington, N. Y.

**CARE can help only if you help!**

**Send a "Food Crusade" Package Overseas**

22 lbs. of U.S. Farm Surplus Delivered To a Hungry Family IN YOUR NAME FOR $1

*Mail your contribution to:*

660 FIRST AVE.
NEW YORK, N. Y.

**BREAKING THE SILENCE OF 2000 YEARS**

The LAST LIVING MEMBER of the ESOTERIC BROTHERHOOD, ordained as keepers of the Eleusinian Wisdom, has now been directed to spread its light to a world prepared for it at this crucial period.

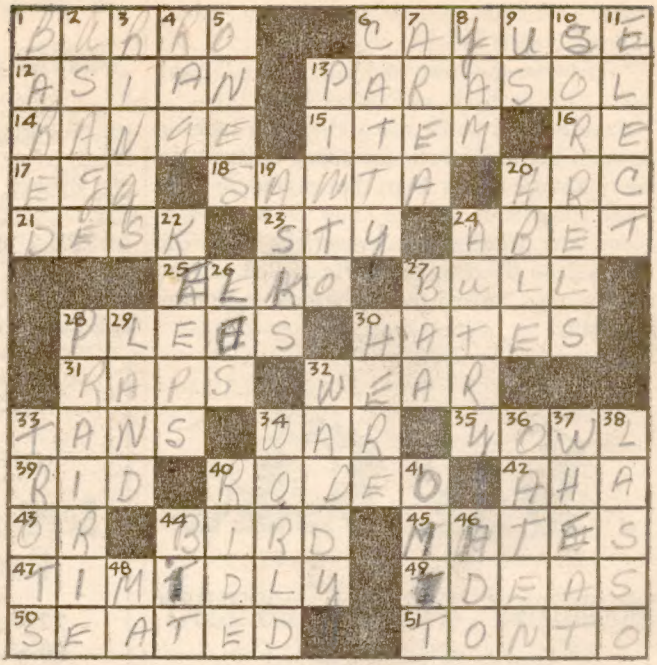
Let this light protect your path and point the way out of what appears to be confusion, uncertainty and instability, bestowing its reassuring peace, confidence and understanding for more successful realization of all your hopes and aspirations.

There is a way. The light is beckoning.

WRITE TODAY, without obligation, for "THE DOORWAY TO LIGHT" through "MYSTISCIENCE".

**ESOTERIC BROTHERHOOD, Dept. 2,**
21 W. Anapamu St., Santa Barbara, Calif.

# THE WESTERNERS' CROSSWORD PUZZLE



*The solution of this puzzle will appear in the next issue*

ACROSS

1 Western pack animal
6 Indian pony
12 Native of Asia
13 Sunshade
14 Cattle land
15 Detail
16 Musical note
17 Hen fruit
18 ——— Claus
20 Curved line
21 Writing table
23 Pigpen
24 To aid and help
25 City in Nevada
27 Calf's papa
28 Entreaties
30 Detests
31 Knocks
32 To have on, as clothes
33 Sunburns
34 Fight between nations
35 To cry mournfully
39 Free of
40 Wild West show
42 Cry of triumph
43 Either
44 Robin or canary
45 Matching pair
47 In a timid manner
49 Thoughts
50 Occupying a chair
51 Lone Ranger's Indian friend

DOWN

1 Uncovered
2 Mode of using
3 Finger ornaments
4 Shred of cloth
5 Units
6 Like a cat
7 Open surface
8 Sweet potato
9 You and me
10 Reddish-brown horses
11 To choose by vote
13 Calico horse
19 Inquiries
20 Capable
22 Retains
24 Gene ———, cowboy
26 ——— Vegas, Nevada
27 To bleat, as sheep
28 Western treeless land
29 Ground
30 In this place
32 Cowboy
33 Moves, as a horse
34 Universe
36 Made of oats
37 Cereal plant
38 Cowboy's rope
40 To go on horseback
41 To leave out
44 Part of a bridle
46 Fuss
48 Mom

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | A | G | E | | W | E | S | T | E | R | N | S |
| A | L | A | N | | O | V | E | R | L | O | O | K |
| W | I | L | Y | | W | A | V | E | | T | R | Y |
| S | T | E | E | R | | D | E | E | P | | | |
| | | | R | A | C | E | R | | A | B | U | T |
| S | U | M | | N | O | D | | R | I | A | T | A |
| W | R | A | N | G | O | | C | O | R | R | A | L |
| A | G | R | E | E | | T | A | D | | S | H | E |
| B | E | E | T | | L | I | N | E | R | | | |
| | | | S | W | A | N | | O | A | S | I | S |
| A | D | E | | A | S | I | A | | N | I | C | E |
| S | U | R | M | I | S | E | D | | C | R | E | E |
| H | E | R | E | F | O | R | D | | H | E | R | D |

*Solution to puzzle in preceding issue*

# Like to be an artist?

*Take free Art Talent Test!* Find out if you have talent worth training. Demand for artists is increasing—for advertising, cartooning, illustrating. Earnings range up to $500 a week. Thousands got started by taking this simple Art Talent Test. You take it at home in spare time. Test was developed by professional artists to uncover new talent. Offered free. No obligation. Mail coupon today for your copy!

STUDIO 11636

**ART INSTRUCTION, INC.**
500 South 4th St. • Minneapolis 15, Minn.

Please send me your Talent Test, without cost or obligation. (PLEASE PRINT)

Name_____ AGE_____

Address_____ City_____

Zone_____ County_____ State_____

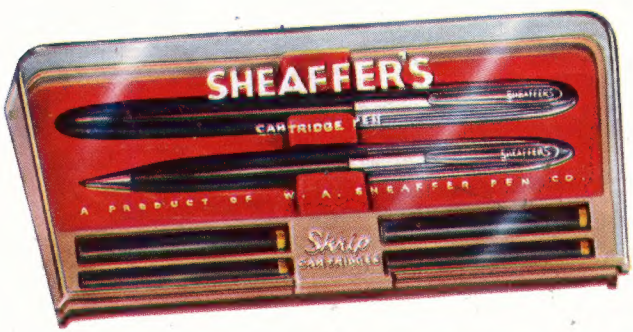
Occupation_____ Phone_____

# SO CLEVER– NO LEVER!

*the fountain pen that fills like a ballpoint*

# SHEAFFER'S CARTRIDGE PEN

You never dip this pen into an ink bottle. You never fool with levers. To fill it, just drop a Skrip cartridge into the barrel and write. Pen point is tipped with precious metal to glide smoothly over paper. Here's a gift you can count on to stretch smiles without stretching your gift budget. At pen counters everywhere.




**COMPLETE SET**

*Only* $4.95

Pen, matching pencil, four Skrip cartridges.

Watch "THE BROTHERS" on CBS-TV Tuesday nights.

Copyright 1956, W. A. Sheaffer Pen Company, Fort Madison, Iowa, U.S.A.
In Canada: Goderich, Ontario In Australia: Melbourne In Great Britain: London